



# **NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN AND WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR**

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The most common occupation for marginal farmers and agricultural labourers to take up in the off-season is forest-product collection. This includes gathering fuelwood, fodder, honey, gum, fruits, and medicinal plants. Women who live close to towns can sell the products directly and receive a better price for these products, but most women have to deal through traders who exploit them.

Medicinal herb collectors in Raipur, M.P., complained that they only earn Rs. 3 selling an entire day's collection to a trader, even though it requires much skill to identify these plants and know in which seasons to harvest them. They said if they could earn a fair amount if they could be directly linked to the Vaid. In this regard, the efforts of voluntary organisations like Prayog deserve special mention. Representatives from this organisation came to Raipur to meet the Commission. They described their achievements in helping tribal women to set up their own outlets for selling forest produce, developing links, with Vaid, and establishing a rapport between the tribals and the forest guards, so that they can deal more amicably with one another. Another important skill they are teaching is how to deal in the marketplace and get a fair price for the costly forest products for which they have been traditionally exploited.

Mirabai, in Udaipur district, Rajasthan, earns about Rs. 35 per month collecting honey. It takes her two days to collect one kilo which she sells to a trader for Rs. 1.50-2. She did not know the price in the city market was Rs. 60 per kg. Her earnings however, are better than her neighbour who is involved in gum collection.

It takes Dapubai 10-12 days to collect 10 kg. of gum. The trader's man gives her Rs. 7 for 10 kg. She cannot protect at the low price because it is illegal to collect gum. "How can I demand a higher price? The trader's man threatens to report me to the Forest Authorities. Then we will get nothing. We have to accept what he offers." As she told her story to the Commission, she began to cry. "He is a Pardesi (from Gujarat). He has permission to roam about in the forests. But we are the children of the forest, and we are not permitted. We were cultivating land here, growing maize for our children—only that. But even this the Forest Department has taken from us, what can we say?"

Many labourers and forest collectors in Rajasthan have survived only because of the Drought Relief programmes which is giving them foodgrains. Some have not been able to cultivate a crop in last ten years due to lack of water. In the meantime, their heavy reliance on forest products for income keeps pushing the forests further and further back. When the Commission was leaving Mada Village in Kanba district, all the women crowded around the members and one passed her hands together and repeatedly said, "Behnji, please send famine", meaning the famine Relief Work.

In Punjab, the labourers' difficulties stemmed from the industrialization of farming practices in the state, and the influx of migrants from U.P. and Bihar who drive the wages down for residents, because they'll accept Rs. 8 per day. In the potato fields, women are digging, grading, and packing the crops. They have lost their work as weeders due to extensive use of weed-killers. During the harvest season they work 12 hour days, and they suffer giddiness from the chemicals, along with aching backs and bodies. Some of these women keep cattle to supplement their income from milk sales, but even this is being thwarted by the use of chemicals. The paddy straw which they used to carry home from the fields is too laden with toxins to feed their cattle now. They have also lost the work of transplanting paddy due to the use of a transplanting machine. Even against these odds, women there are still planning for other earning schemes—they told the Commission they wanted ponds for fish farming and said, "If they could only get the Revenue Department to give a third of the village land to us (Scheduled Castes), we could provide green fodder to the whole village."

Most of the women the Commission met and talked with were resourceful, and had priorities and hopes for the future. There were however some who were so defeated by their circumstances that they could not envision any escape from the drudgery and hopelessness of their lives. Latika Pal, a tiny shrunken woman from Sonital village in Bankura dist., West Bengal, was one such woman. She looked like she must have once been beautiful and shining like a fresh brinjal, but now she has withered into a dull, dark, lifeless woman. She is a widow with two young daughters. Her husband died because they had no money to treat him when he was ill. Now she supports herself and her daughters on the Rs. 2.50 or Rs. 3 she makes from collecting fuelwood, datoon, and fruits on the days the forest guards do not take them away. She looked like she herself didn't eat anything. When the Commission asked her what



she would like the most, she did not answer. Some one probed further "How could your situation be improved?" She still could not answer. She could only stare with her glazed eyes, murmuring, "two daughters.. two daughters..." Her greatest worry and obsession was to marry off her 10 and 12 year old daughters. But how?

Another group of agricultural labourers who are in a similarly vulnerable position, are the women of dadan labourers' families from Ganjam District in Orissa. 'Dadan' means to give in advance, and is used for men from this backward area of Orissa who want to migrate out to work. They give an advance to a contractor to help them find work either outside the state or outside the country. Once the men go, they are sometimes never heard from again. The wife or mother of the migrant does not know what circumstances her husband or her husband is in. One woman, Babi Rawt, saw her husband go off 15 years ago and he has not returned since. One contractor told her that he was sick, and hospitalized in Bombay, but she has received no news since then (10 years ago). "People condemn me as a widow, but I am not. Or maybe I am. God only knows." When asked what her priorities are, she simply replied, "I am too tired." And about the Mahila Samiti in her village, she said, "They cannot do anything for me." In the meantime, she continues working for Rs. 5/-day during paddy season—one of many in her position in the area.

At another Orissa village, Sukhinda, the Commission was disturbed by what they witnessed at a Government Seed Farm. 300 women were labouring there, transplanting, irrigating, weeding, and harvesting seeding. They made up 90% of the workers. The supervisors prefer women "because they are efficient. Tribal men are always drunk." Yet there is no creche or medical facility and even drinking water is not within easy reach. This job only provides them with four months of work at Rs. 10 per day. All the women said they preferred working on private farms because at least there they could bring their children, and there they are provided with lunch (rice) - which the children can also share. They preferred to work on private farms even though their wages were lower there-Rs. 8 per day. In the off-season, these women vend, or do casual labour at digging for Rs. 5 per day, or make quilts at Rs.1 per quilt. They told the Commission their priorities were drinking water closer to the field, a shed to rest in for a while during recess time, and a better wage of Rs. 15 per day.

Another sole supporter of her family was Govindamma, from Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. She has five children and a husband to support. She managed this on seasonal work in the paddy fields, at which she earns Rs.10 per day, when there is work. Due to drought this year, there is no work in her village. She could not give any reason for her husband not working. When the Commission asked her if she was planning to have a family planning operation, she said no, she could not, due to a cardiac problem. "Well, what about your husband undergoing the operation?" one member asked. "Oh, he cannot either, because he has to support the family," she replied, despite his unemployed status. When the Commission asked if she sends her children to school, she said, "Yes, because at least there they get a mid-day meal."

Women who have been organized into some Mahila Mandal, or workers' union, or cooperative society, or have had some interaction with some development project seemed to have a much clearer picture of their rights, and what laws existed to protect them, even if they did not understand how to acquire those rights.

The most unsettling meeting the Commission had with a group of organized women took place in Maheshwaram in Andhra Pradesh. Here they met the Ibrahimpatnam Taluka Agricultural Labour Union members. About 50 women from the 10,000 member strong union attended the meeting. The union was organized around bonded-labourers and exerts efforts to free families from oppressive situations of labouring for little or no wages.

The meeting was unsettling not only because the union is having difficulty in acquiring the rights set out by law for the landless labourers, but also because of recent violence against the labourers, initiated by the landlords and perpetuated by the police and government officials.

The local leader of the trade union, whose family was formerly bonded labourers, spoke very articulately about the non-implementation of minimum wages, lack of any land reforms, and impotency of the land ceiling laws. She told the story to the Commission about the destructive, oppressive situation occurring amongst them:

"We are landless, yet we know about the land reform acts. We could see around us all the land being occupied by large landowners, and we thought, 'so why not bonded labourers?' Several months back the workers began demanding their rights to land by submitting an application for 50 acres of government land. There is a great deal of government land here, and all the landless from this village were asking for only this small parcel. No action was taken on this petition. Finally, we went to occupy the land, and began clearing shrubs so it could be cultivated."

As she began to describe what happened, the entire group of women got agitated and also began to vehemently protest their situation. Pochamma, one of the women who was arrested following the occupation, took up the story and told what happened to her family:

They were working one morning in an orchard of custard apples, for a landlord. The police arrived, with one lady officer. Despite her presence, the police started beating them; pulling their hair, ripping off their clothing, and dragging many of them off to be arrested. Pochamma's daughter-in-law had just given birth a few days before, so Pochamma begged the police not to arrest her as she was still very raw. The police ordered her to pull up her sari and prove her condition. Following this, they left her and arrested Pochamma. She is a 60 year old woman. They tore out her hair, and tortured her with bending and touching her toes and beating her. She showed the Commission her skinny, wrinkled, old-woman's thigh, still bruised blue two months later. They also arrested her son and tortured him from morning till evening. She described to the Commission how their condition started:

"When we were bonded we did daily 'akili' for the landlord—we cleaned the courtyard, house, and kept the cattle, for which we were sometimes given a small amount of paddy, and once a year, a sari. After we formed the union, we stopped 'akili' for this pittance. Our 'jagriti' (awakening) became unbearable for them, and this type of violence against us began."

Despite their organization, these labourers are still earning only two kg. paddy per day of work, or Rs. 3 - Rs. 5. They prefer payment in grain, because "this much money is only good for salt". They go hungry in the two months when no agricultural work is available. At the end of the season, they are given 10 kg. paddy per crop, which only lasts six days.

The Lambada tribal women who were present in their bright acquired dresses and heavy ornaments told the Commission that their application for land has been pending for eight months with the Block Development Officer, with no result.

When the Commission asked what their priorities were, they all shouted "LAND." Then they presented this memorandum to the Commission:

"Can we not till land? Cannot the Police be punished for this torture? Is he God that can do anything he likes to us? As women, where is our safety in these villages?"

The Commission members left this village very disturbed and depressed by the reports they had been given.

Despite such disturbing observations in most of the places when the Commission met organised women, they found more positive progress. Some organizations which, with the support of authorities, are making productive headway in women's development work. One is Rajasthan's "Women's Development Project". The Commission members observed a marked difference in the agricultural workers' attitudes in villages where WDP's work has been going on. All the women there know about the benefits of extension services for improved methods in agriculture, about minimum wages for labour, and about acquiring loans. In Udaipur district, the women were aware and agitating about the zinc pollution from the prestigious zinc plant which is destroying their crops and their health. Everywhere in Rajasthan, women are observing the decline of agriculture, and hence, the decline in the chances of employment. However, thanks to the community awareness instilled by WDP, these strong women no longer cry over their fate. Instead, they collectively try to find a solution. When a problem arises, they say, "Chalo, meeting Karenge:" (Come, let us discuss it in a meeting!)

When WDP was started three years ago, their three targets were Education and Training; Health, Nutrition and Family Welfare; and Employment and Economic Development. Awareness on all of these issues could be found everywhere amongst women participating in the programme. They have been successful in fighting against liquor and for clean water. When they were not getting minimum wages for their agricultural labour, they organized and filed a complaint against their contractor to the Collector.

They got their fair wage after that.

In another incident, a woman was kidnapped from a village where WDP was centred. After a time, the Sathin (the woman leader from the village) came to know of where this woman had been taken. They went and (with the help of police) brought her back. At first the village would not accept her because she had been staying in another man's house despite the fact that she had been forced to do so against her will. The WDP women went to the Panch of her caste, and persuaded them to accept her back. They agreed, and once they had agreed, the rest of the village also came to accept her.

These types of women were much clearer than unorganized women about setting priorities, and making demands when the Commission asked them. From their unanimous demands for "more work", "more income", "more knowledge", the time appears to be ripe for WDP to begin implementing their third objective of Employment and Economic Development on a bigger scale.

Another integrated project which the Commission visited was a good example of many government departments pooling their funds and resources to develop several aspects of landless labourers' lives. This project was in Bade Marenga, Jagdalpur district in Madhya Pradesh. It was one of twenty villages doing this type of project in the area. Two thousand hectares of land has been given to landless tribals from this area for a forestry programme. Under IRDP they have started an already productive nursery programme raising pineapple and other fruit tree seedlings, as well as fodder and mulberry trees. Women run the nursery, earning Rs. 500/months. The Horticulture Department is giving technical training and plant stock to the project. Because the group is tribal, there has not been the usual resistance from males that is found amongst non-tribals, towards women taking this training.

While this nursery/forestry project is operating with the help of NREP, another scheme under RLEGP is manifesting on the land. Housing and a workshop for silk reeling are being constructed. The tribals are constructing the houses themselves, and being paid a rate of Rs.13 per day for women, Rs. 15 for men (even under Government schemes, unequal wages are perpetuated).

When the Commission saw all the reeling machines which had been purchased, they asked if women would also do this work. The officials said they were not sure, because "illiterate women cannot manage it, and the more educated women may not want this kind of work."

The Commission members tried to explain to the officials involved how women are being gradually displaced from labour due to mechanization, without a conscious realization by officials. The Commission saw many illiterate women using more complex machines than these on their tour.

This project was developing excellent economic prospects for these landless people, but the Commission noticed a lack of awareness among the women working on this project. They still perceived of themselves as workers, rather than the active thinkers and decision makers which the WDP has developed, in Rajasthan.

Himachal Pradesh was the state where women generally had a higher level of awareness than most other states. One group of women in Lahol know quite clearly that they would like to have some training under TRYSEM, yet they were quite critical of the training which had been offered to them. TRYSEM offered a training course through a potato-growers' cooperative, since it would be easier to reach already-organized women. They offered the training in weaving, which the women do not think has a useful market potential in their area. Furthermore, they offered the course during the peak potato harvest season. "So how could we come?" one woman asked. "If we have our own fields, we must work hard to save all the harvest. If we are working in others' fields, we get higher wages during this time, plus 10 Kg. of potatoes for each day's work."

They, like women in many other states, were interested in receiving training in processing whatever cash crops were growing in their region. Then they knew for certain that raw materials were available, that there was a market, and that they could earn a better income after the training. These sorts of ambitions amongst women working in agriculture ran parallel to their demands for access to credit, or even more basic things, like clean drinking water, or enforcement of minimum wages, or abolition of the liquor stalls on which they blamed their "sole supporter of the family" status.

## Dairying

The women the Commission met who were working at dairying were the poorer women who are

engaged in this occupation as marginal farmers, or landless labourers. Most of them worked at other jobs as well, or had taken up dairying because they could not find other work and were able to get a loan for this purpose. They were generally happy about the work they were doing. They enjoy keeping the animals, and they respect the work as well as the extra income. Most of the women only made about Rs. 60-70 a month on each animal though, they usually keep only one or two cows or buffaloes. Those who are members of milk cooperatives have a higher income up to Rs. 150 per month, because the prices are fixed, and the members are not bound to the dealer-cum-moneylender's interest rates and his below market-rate prices.

The problems in dairying work are most acute for landless women, because they have limited access to fodder. A woman from Garam Pani village in Nainital district, U.P., told the Commission that each of her two cows gives about three litres of milk a day. She sells it to a dairy at Rs. 3/- kg. From her average income of Rs. 18 a day, she has to purchase Rs. 15 of fodder, as she has no time to go to the jungle and collect it herself. She is now paying back her second loan of Rs. 3,000, which she took for her second animal.

Many loan repayment schemes do not take into account the expenses a woman will incur in purchasing fodder for her animal, making repayment rates unrealistic, or leaving the woman with no income. A Scheduled Caste woman, Karunaden, from Bihar, got a *desi* cow on an IRDP loan. She gets four litres of milk a day, and sells three of them to the local trader. She earns Rs. 300/- month, out of which she spends Rs. 100 on fodder. She is supposed to pay back Rs. 200/- month. She says "Dung is the only source of income from this cow," dung and the small calf, which she will raise into her second milk producing animal. Both she and her husband work as agricultural labourers for about six months of the year. Her husband averages Rs. 10/- day, while she herself earns about Rs. 4. Since she does not have enough fodder or her land, she buys groundnut cake at Rs. 3/- kg. She said she may only be able to pay back Rs. 150/month.

Chandrika, the Harijan Secretary of the Deodholera village milk cooperative in Gujarat, confirms this problem amongst their members. "These loans must be adequate," she told the Commission, "they must include funds for fodder as well as for the milk cattle."

She had a lot to tell the Commission about their experiences in cooperative farming. This is the oldest women's cooperative in the district. She said, "It took us three years to settle down as a co-op. How much could we fight? We had to fight the trader, the dairy officers, the *seths* of the village, banks, men of our own village—sometimes I had to fight my own man. We fight constantly against corruption and oppression, and how ill-equipped we are. It took three years to build solidarity and loyalty, and to educate ourselves in co-op. rules and management. None of us had experience in any of these before. People need to realize how long this process takes."

The Chairwoman of this cooperative, Savitaben, added a few other suggestions to Chandrika's account: "In some cases, daily payment to the women would help fight the trader-cum-moneylender's power over them. Also we need to change the rule of requiring a 90-day supply of milk from a future member to make her eligible for membership. This automatically excludes the landless, and poor, cowless women from becoming members."

If cooperatives could organize to overcome some of these difficulties, they could offer education and protection to alleviate problems like those of Laxmi, in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district. She is not a cooperative member, but has taken a loan on her own for her dairying enterprise. She told the Commission, "I took a loan for a cow, but it died of heat stroke. The cow was insured, but I could not get the insurance because I had not paid the premium. Now, tell me, how would I know that I have also to renew the premium every year? Someone should tell me that. I am illiterate."

The Commission heard many such stories about this problem of animals on loan dying before the loan had been repaid. It was usually linked to the animal being a crossbreed which was not suitable to the climate, or too disease-prone, or due to complete lack of training for the woman who received the animal.

Other women have had better experience with their animals, though. In Garam Pani, U.P., one such woman was enthusiastic enough to want to start a dairy cooperative there. She took a buffalo on a loan of Rs. 3500. Last year she repaid Rs. 500 from the income she receives from two litres of milk per day,

sold in the local market. She wants more cattle because she has seven family members (adult women) who can attend well to cattle and cattle feed. She also wants more land for both dairying and cultivation. She said, "If you teach me about dairy co-ops., I will teach others."

The low milk price fetched from local traders and the difficulty of getting loans has been somewhat solved for the women who are members of dairy cooperatives. The Commission visited women in such co-ops in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar. One woman from Gujarat, Savitaben, told a story of how the cooperative helped her escape the situations many women find themselves in with the local trader:

"I had only one cow before, but now I have two. A private trader gave us a low price for the milk, but he had also given us an advance—so I was bonded to him. I could not cut the relationship with him because of that advance. Then there was pressure both from him and from the co-op. to give my milk. I was torn between the two. There were others like me, too. The organizer pleaded our cases and we got a loan from the Women's Co-op Bank. With this, I got released from the trader."

The problem of green fodder still remains. Her 15 acres of land has been mortgaged for many years to a big farmer. She has joined savings scheme in the co-op to help her recover the land. Some of her Rs. 100-Rs. 150 monthly milk income is saved towards that end.

In Dumali village, Vaishali district, Bihar, Kaushalyadevi reported different kinds of positive experiences from her association with the local women's dairy co-op. She owns and cares for three cattles, but sends her husband or son to deliver the milk to the co-op because uppercaste women observe purdah there. She has received training in vet services, cattle care, and milk testing from the co-op. She also went on a study tour to Madras and Anand. She said, "We were amazed to see women in Tamilnadu working in the fields and everywhere with their heads uncovered by saris. That tour gave us a lot of courage. Because of that, we went to Patna to training which we had rejected twice before the tour."

In her village women were earning an average of Rs. 200/month, per animal through the co-op. A Harijan woman, Laxmidevi who owns two buffaloes, said that she has Rs. 80 left after she feeds them—again because she is landless. She told the Commission that she had received training in milk testing but she was not allowed to work in the co-op. Nonetheless, she attends the meetings of the Managing Committee to urge the co-op. to accept other Harijan women unto their membership. They are not so fortunate as the Gujarati women though. They also are bound by loans to the local trader, and until they are repaid, they cannot join the cooperative.

Both Laxmidevi and Kaushalyadevi said their priority was a Mahila Bank in the village. The upper caste woman also said she wanted to see an anganwadi in Dumali.

The extension worker for this Mahila Kutubpur Dugdha Utpadak Mandali co-op. was patient and sensitive to the women's needs. She said, "The women take time to settle in and adjust to their roles in the co-op. But their co-op. runs better than the men's because they are more honest."

In another Bihar co-op., in Chakiari, when the Commission asked the women about their priorities, they unanimously shouted, "Mahila Bank."

One Commission member countered, "Who will run it? You are all illiterate!"

"Our daughters will run it!" they shouted. "They are literate."

The Commission saw this kind of remarkable self-motivation again in Himachal Pradesh. In Mashobra block, one woman has a Jersey cow from which she earns Rs. 70/month. But she said Jersey milk was not preferred in her village, and transportation to the city is a problem, so the milk sometimes gets wasted. She had not received any training in cattle care or milk production, but she and many other women urged the Commission to give them some training.

"We have good resources for butter," this 40 year old, illiterate woman suggested. "Give us training, and help us get equipment to increase our yield."

"What kind of equipment?" one Commission member asked.

"Like tractors that will work in hilly areas!"

"Will you drive the tractor yourself?" she asked.

"Yes—to improve our lives, I will. Please teach us these things," she said, "otherwise our lives will be like that of buffaloes."

Everybody laughed, but she went on to insist, "If we form a co-op. we will have to be assured of a

market—otherwise it will not be successful.”

The Himachal Pradesh women were not the only ones anxious to get training. Assamese women stressed what important assets their cattle are to them, but they really need training to make them more productive. One woman in Gauhati who has a Jersey cow on IRDP loan, gets only one litre of milk a day. She has not been able to repay any of her Rs. 4,000 loan.

Again and again, the Commission heard plea for veterinary training. In the hilly areas like Himachal Pradesh, houses and villages are scattered, and women want to know the skills themselves, so they can care for their animals properly, before they die.

In Andhra Pradesh, women have been organized longer into co-ops., promoted by the State Dairy Development Corporation. They have acquired skills of good cattle care, account keeping, management techniques, and sound business practices. The Government lends good support there. In Nalgonda district, most of the cooperative members are Harijans. One member claimed, “The upper castes are not interested in dairying because there is not much return from cattle. The land can be put to more productive use, like cash crops.”

One other A.P. woman, Ulaimma, was not a member of a co-op. She voiced a common complaint that the Commission came across in their meetings—the unreasonable length of time to acquire a loan:

“The bank took months to negotiate the loan. During that period the cow sauntered by me two times and went out of my hands. Finally, when the bank was ready, the seller raised the price of the cow. The bank stuck to its amount of Rs. 3000, so I had to borrow Rs. 500 from someone else.

“But I got the cow, and she is good. She has given me a calf now, and I am happy.”

## Small Animal Husbandry

The women the Commission found engaged in small animal husbandry were of two kinds—either from a family which traditionally raises small animals as their caste occupation, or women who were trying to bring in some extra income outside of their agricultural work. Most women felt very comfortable doing this kind of work. It was a natural extension of their maternal skills, and they were usually good at it. No one the Commission met was earning much from this occupation though. And they heard several disaster stories of women who had taken loans but no training, their animals dying and making failures of their schemes for a better income.

A Nagaland woman’s account of all the work she has to do to make ends meet at home was typical of small animal raisers all over the country. She was from Kohima village, and when the Commission asked her what occupations she was engaged in, she held up her hand to count what she did during her 14 or 15 hour-long workdays: “Work in the fields, gather fuel, fodder, rear pigs, weave, carry water, cook, care for the children.” She said she earns about Rs. 70 every month from rearing 15-20 pigs. Her uppermost priority was employment for her educated sons, “so we will not have to work so hard.”

A Vaghari family in Banaskantha district in Gujarat is engaged in the traditional occupation of bird rearing. The woman’s son goes to the jungle to catch parrots, swallows, and other birds, and brings them to her to rear. She prepares the cage, trains the birds along with her husband, and prepares them for market. Her son goes to Ahmedabad to sell the birds at the Sunday market. The family income from this is about Rs. 600 per month, but the son squanders some of the money on drinking when he goes to market. The woman is trying to get her daughter-in-law to take the birds to market, since she is from the town, or at least go with her husband, so he will not be able to steal the money.

The woman was not interested in a loan—in fact she was afraid of it. “If we fail to repay, they would take my son to jail, and the police would beat us!”

Her fear of already being poor and then falling into debt is a reality for many poor women. They are given a loan-based scheme without training, or no access to veterinary skills, or a *videshi* breed of animal which is vulnerable to the climate or the diseases of the area.

One woman in Kulu, H.P., is under the curse of an IRDP loan her husband took to get ten goats. He took the loan without consulting her. If he got any training, she was not included. After a while, the husband died. Since she did not know about goat rearing, nine of the goats died. She had no income, and was angry as well as destitute. “Now I have to feed the babies, the damned goat, and feed the

Bank!"

One of her neighbours has a different problem with her loan—her rabbits have not died, but she is being charged 18% interest. She took the loan against her husband's wishes to add another 80 rabbits to the 20 which she already had, so he will not help her in repaying it. She only earns Rs. 50 per month, and is frustrated because she is only repaying interest, not the loan. Her demand was for a low interest rate.

Several women in Udaipur district suffered identical fates with the IRDP loans they took for chickens. They were given 'foreign' poultry. One woman's husband was planning a village co-op., for marketing eggs. He was organizing other villagers who had also received loans for chickens. All their chickens died. The co-op. became a joke. The women said, "We prefer the Desi variety of chicken which are not disease prone!" and "I was hoping for more income!" and finally, "My dream is shattered."

At least their loans were smaller. Another woman in Udaipur took a Rs.5,000 loan on her own name, for 100 chickens. The loan procedure was very cumbersome. She said, "I had to open at least three bank accounts. I had to go three different times to the bank to open them. Because I have land, I got the loan. But the loan did not succeed because all the chicken died. Now that I have taken a loan, and because I have land—you know what kind of land we have in Rajasthan—I am rejected from the famine relief work. Now what?"

A success story of an IRDP loan was encountered in Gujarat. The Commission met a family of the Vaghari community in the Mehsana district. They were landless, but raising about 200 chicken next to their kuccha house. Out of 12 houses in their neighbourhood, half have poultry. This family had only 13 chicken before. They twice took loans under IRDP, and now they have 200. They did not get any training, but this did not hamper them as they are traditional rearers of chicken, pigs, and other birds. They were very appreciative of the loan facility. Now they earn about Rs. 500 per month, from the woman of the family selling the birds in the Mehsana market.

The Commission was also lucky to meet a Gujjar community on the roadside when they were on their way from Achbal to Pelgaum. They were sheep herding on the banks of the Lidder river, and had made a camp near the road. The Commission members got down from their jeep to meet a five-generation family who were all migrating together. They were headed by Zaina, the oldest member of the family, a woman looked about 70 years old. Zaina and her daughter-in-law Manzoora told the Commission members that in summer they return to Kashmir, and in the winter they move to Jammu with all their family and herds. They said, "Our biggest fear is wild animals. They devour our sheep. This year we lost 36 of 261 sheep to them. Because of this our sheep often stay in the tents with us. This little one shares her blanket with the sheep!" they said pointing to one little daughter.

They keep guard dogs to prevent this slaughter. They face other problems as well. This year the river flooded and their tents got submerged. They lost one infant who got very ill.

While they are travelling, this community of about 40 people engages a teacher to give education to their sons and daughters. The teacher is a SSC pass boy of their community, and his salary is paid by the State Government.

## **Fishery**

The women the Commission met who were engaged in fishing work generally undertook one or more of the three tasks—fish processing, fish vending, and net-making. After meeting women involved in these tasks in Kerala, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Orissa, the Commission felt that women who were involved in traditional fishing practices were steadily losing ground against the mechanised fishing sector. Mechanised production techniques have many ramifications on traditional fisher peoples' lives. Because they trawl in deep water, netting larger catches, and have fishing facilities, transportation networks, and a greater range of markets, they are capturing the lion's share of the market. Many women complained about losing their space in the markets to these larger vendors, and how much more vulnerable their produce is to spoilage, because they lack chilling and transportation facilities.

One major factor in women fish vendor's difficulties is their exclusion from the fishing cooperatives to which the men of the village belong. Because they are not members, they cannot get credit to help



expand their vending operations, or organize the hire of reliable transport, or learn sound business practices, or become informed about issues affecting them.

Women in Pathara, Ganjam district, Orissa, told the Commission about their work as vendors. The first one said she daily buys 1/2kg-2 kgs. of the fish from men in the village. She walks to the market of the adjoining village, and sells it there. She earns Rs. 3-Rs. 6 per day. Her priority was to get credit. She had no idea about cooperatives.

Her neighbour buys fish from a wholesaler. When she is not able to sell it all, or becomes too tired walking through the villages (she often suffers from legache and bodyache), she dries the fish—it can easily be sold. She also would like more capital so she could expand her sales and earn more. She has tried to take a loan, but could not get it. She said she was afraid of loans and banks. A Commission member asked her how much loan she needed. She replied, "Rs. 20."

"Is that all?!"

"Yes, it is enough!" she answered emphatically.

The third woman there said she makes nets on order. She is supplied with the nylon thread, and earns Rs. 8-10 per net. She gets an average of four orders a month. During the season she gets up to 20 orders a month. "Still," she said, "it is very difficult to cope, because I am alone. My husband has gone to Kuwait. He sends me an average of Rs. 1500 every two months, but all that money goes into repaying the loan he had taken to go to Kuwait. I have been repaying regularly for 35 instalments. I do not know how long to repay. He does not write to me. May be he himself does not know.

"Now, I want a loan for myself. Then I could buy my own nylon and keep the nets ready for sale." When one member asked her if she belonged to the village co-op., she said, "No, but I would like to become a member."

In Trivandrum district, Kerala, the Commission met with a women's organisation of fish vendors, processors and net-makers. Their demands were clearly articulated. They were not getting space in the markets because men were usurping their places. Tax collectors and other goondas harass the women vendors. They do not know how to deal with goondas like the men vendors do. These women resent the tax these men collect, because they did not even get legitimate space. These women vendors want a separate market. Another complaint they lodged was about the government scheme to compensate men's fishing accidents with Rs. 50,000 while women are not covered by the scheme.

Aleyamma, one of the organizers of this group, said, "Men's application for pension are encouraged, but not ours. The officers do not accept women as producers. What we need is a separate women's wing in the Fish Welfare Society."

Vasantha, another member, began to wave her arms angrily as she interrupted her and said, "And also, it should be compulsory for every co-op. of fisher folk that women be members! If not, they can go on catching fish. If we do not sell them, men's fish will rot the whole of Kerala—understand?"

A woman vendor at the meeting raised other issues when she told the Commission her story: "My man goes to sea, catches fish, and sells them to the wholesaler. I cannot sell his fish, because it will not sell in our market. I buy my fish from the market and sell in surrounding villages. Both of us are losers, as such. There is very little profit margin in this vending. Fish caught by machine-boats are cheaper. They also have iced-fish. Our fish gets rotten quickly. Then, transport is also a problem. Our organisation fought and got vehicles by MATSYAFED, but we have to pay Rs. 65 per month for it. This is a lot when we only earn Rs. 10-15 per day. And if we miss the bus, we have to hire a scooter, which eats up the entire day's earnings! What we need are transport and loan facilities for all of us. And I mean quick loans, at the time of the season."

Some other women in this group were preparing fish pickle in their homes, for MATSYAFED, and they were earning Rs. 130 per month. All of them were ready to produce more, but are waiting for market development.

After this meeting, the Commission went to visit the MATSYAFED Centre, right on the coast in the Trivandrum District. Here women were doing fish processing into pickle, paced dry fish, and fish cutlets. Here also, because of limited market, the women are only earning Rs. 100 per month.

Here in this coastal village, at dusk, as tourists, we watched men, women and children busily engaged in producing alcohol near their house. Their three storeyed pucca house stood as a guarantor of



their good income. We did not disclose our identity.

A different kind of MATSYAFED Centre is operating in Quilon. Women use the centre by paying a service charge of 30 paise per kg. of fish they clean there. They buy shrimps and prawns from the landing centre which is right there, for Rs. 20/kg. They peel and clean them in the hygienic conditions of the centre. Then they sell them to the freezing centre for Rs. 30-40/kg. They also have the option of taking them to the local market, but they do not usually risk that. These women have an average income of Rs. 15-25 per day.

One other fishing vendor in Bombay expressed similar problems as the Orissi, Keralite, and Gujarati fish vendors. She sells fish in Dharavi slum, but faces constant police harassment. She earns up to Rs. 20 per day, but she says, "I do not earn much because of lack of ice facility. Ice is very costly for me, and we are caught in this competition of iced and fresh fish."

The Vaghari community in Dholka block village, Gujarat, is up against a different power struggle. They complained of the local power groups not allowing them to catch fish in the village ponds, which is their traditional right. There is a government policy to let the Panchayat auction off the village ponds. The Panchayat takes possession of these ponds, but the benefits are not seen by the village, the profits are misappropriated by those in charge.

One Vaghari woman said, "Do not think the Panchayat themselves will fish the pond. They do not have these skills, and it is low work for them. So instead they have to employ us to fish for them, and thus we are turned into their servants. Instead, we want our age old occupation. Our association fought for this, and the Panchayat control was temporarily stayed. But what good now? Now there is no water in the village ponds. No rain, no water, no fish, no vending! There is not even agricultural labour left because of the drought.

"Now we are doomed to be labourers, digging the earth on worksites, getting bullied by supervisors and gangmen. Our women never used to do this work—we were self-employed. Now others are laughing at me in their minds. I used to give them in line to be paid cash. I used to easily earn Rs. 12-15 per day's work. Now we work eight hours in the open sun. I dig and dig earth as hard as stone and earn only Rs. 7 or half foodgrains per day—but paid not daily—three weeks later! This drought has levelled us all to the same poor state."

On the Veraval sea coast of Gujarat, where there are 13 large commercial fishery units, the Commission met two different groups of women. The first were the local women who are traditionally members of fishing villages. They sometimes do peeling or headloading work for the processing units in high season when there is surplus catch. For peeling one big basket, they earn Rs. 100. It takes the family about 2-3 hours, doing the work collectively. They do not generally get this kind of work. Most of the labourers at the processing units are migrants from Kerala. The local women do not like to stand continuously for eight hours like the Kerala girls do. They also refuse to come at the irregular hours when the boats arrive. They also have their own fish processing and trading of their husband's catches. And they do not want to work for such low wages as the migrants take. Generally, they prefer trading to wage labour work. Because of this attitude, the management of the processing units do not like to hire local women. They claim that they are not so dextrous at peeling, and their judgement is not so good in the grading work.

The other group the Commission met here were the migrant labourers. They were a very different story. They were mostly between 13-20 years of age, even though the younger ones all answered "18" when asked. Most were educated to the SSC level. They have been recruited from Cochin and Ernakulum districts, where their families are very poor. They peel and grade the fish at whatever time the boat arrives—usually evenings, for eight hour stretches. They earn between Rs. 210 and Rs. 240 per month. They get two months of leave each year in the off-season—one month is paid. During this time they go back to Kerala. A few of them told the Commission about their family circumstances:

Mary has no father. Her mother is a domestic maid at one family's house, where she earns Rs. 50 per month. Her three younger brothers are studying. Her elder brother (who is 15) is a coolie in a coconut yard.

Malini is a young mother of two small children (two and four years old). She left them behind in Kerala. She sends Rs. 200 back home every three months. Her husband is a clerk earning Rs.500 per

month.

Julie told how the contractor had duped her by saying she would earn Rs. 450 per month in Veraval. But she only gets Rs. 210.

These girls all stay in a house the processing unit is renting in the town, but it is very crowded. They have only a bodylength of space for sleeping. There is open land in front where they spend most of their time when they are not working. The older girls take care of the younger ones. Many are sisters.

Mostly the girls were in a state of flutter and fear while the Commission was there. They were very much afraid of the press, and most of them would not speak to the Commission members when they asked them questions.

Due to the Migrant Labour Act, the processing units made the former contractors into the girls supervisors. These supervisors are with the girls constantly. They even accompany the girls when they go shopping together in the market. None of the girls have learned the local language, even after 5 or 6 years in that place, though the local supervisor had learned Malayalam. The employer keeps the girls secluded in the name of "protection". Now the employer is going to build a hostel adjacent to the processing plant, so they will be even more segregated from the outside world.

When the Commission said to the girls, "The Government should build the hostel for you in town," they quickly refused. "We will not stay in it," they said, "so please do not undertake any expense for us."

When the Commission members asked them about their priorities, again no one would speak. They prodded and provoked them, but not until the meeting was dismissed and the Commission was about to leave, did the girls press around them and say in whispers, "Rs.500/per month", "Rs. 500/per month, please."

## Sericulture

Both tassar and mulberry sericulture have been traditional occupations for Indian women for centuries. For tribal women it traditionally means gathering tassar cocoons from the forest and selling them to a trader, or in the open market. These silk-collectors also actively move the silk worms from one *Arjun* tree to another, enabling them to produce large cocoons. The cocoons are traditionally supplied to a non-tribal weaver's family, where women undertake boiling the cocoons and reeling the thread. Reeling is a process where a woman pulls the inner silk threads from several broken cocoons simultaneously, and twists them by rolling them over her bare thigh or over the bottom of a clay pitcher. This process produces a fine silk thread.

In the last ten years, due to increased exports several *Arjun* plantations have sprung up to actually cultivate the tassar, which originally was a natural forest product. Both commercial and government development scheme plantations have been established. Besides employing the traditional collectors, i.e. tribals to work on the plantations and rear cocoons, some organizations are also training the women to be reelers or spinners. Other projects are incorporating the traditional reelers into the cultivation and rearing processes, so that each group can be involved in the entire process, thereby by-passing the problems of traders reaping all the profits and women's sporadic access to work.

The Commission visited tassar cultivators and labourers in M.P., Bihar, and Orissa. The Madhya Pradesh integrated development project for tribals in Jagdalpur district, where part of 2000 hectares is under *Arjun* cultivation has already been discussed in the section on agriculture.

In West Bengal, the Commission met women at Jhilmill in Bankura district, who had undergone training in tassar cultivation and are now growing *Arjun* on two plots of government land, with government assistance.

In Pothmari village, Assam, women were learning tassar rearing and reeling through their Dipti Mahila Samiti. They were working on the government farm and had taken IRDP loans to get set up in cocoon rearing. The women said that they now want to learn to grow the *Arjun*.

Bihari women whom the Commission met in Patna received reeling and weaving training with a stipend of Rs. 150/month. When the training ended, though, the women were left without much work. Meenadevi complained that she does not have a good outlet for purchasing cocoons. Anardevi said her priority was electricity in her home so that she can work more. She receives very low wages for

weaving, and thus needs to work for longer hours each day. Her problems are experienced by many Bihari women. The private contractors pay abysmally low wages for silk processing, but they give regular work. The Khadi & Village Industries Commission, on the other hand, gives a better price but work is very irregular.

Tassar silk makes up a small percentage of India's silk production. Mulberry makes up the larger part of the production, and women traditionally know all the steps of this process.

In Orissa the Commission visited a government mulberry farm at Shukhinda. It occupies part of a large farm managed by the Agriculture Department. Forty women were employed there at Rs. 10/day to care for the mulberry bushes. They work from 8 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. planting, transplanting, irrigating, weeding, and harvesting leaves. Their male supervisor said these women were good workers "compared to men."

The women knew that this cultivation of mulberry was being used to produce silk, but did not know anything about the further process. They seemed to be interested in further involvement in silk processing.

Kalavati said, "Our work here is only for four months in the monsoon and four months in winter. The rest of the year we have to pass our days with difficulty—going for digging at Rs.5/days and making guilts at the rate 1 kg foodgrains for stitching six guilts. Some of us also vend vegetables in town.

"We are happy with this work—we just want more work."

In Karnataka, at Chandapur village, the Commission met a group of women connected with the sericulture programme. Bhadramma cultivates mulberry on one of her three acres of irrigated land. There are ten such women in the village who are cultivating mulberry. Their mulberry yields three crops a year. The programme began in 1985. They hire female labour, paying Rs. 7/day, plus one meal. These labourers were girls recruited through the village Mahila Mandal.

Ashwathamma, one of the ten women mulberry cultivators, had taken a loan to get irrigation on her land. She and all the other cultivators sell their cocoons to the centre of the sericulture department. None of them was involved in spinning or weaving, though they showed willingness to learn them, rather than simply turning the cocoons over to the centre. Their Mahila Mandal is trying to arrange training through TRYSEM in their own centre. The women workers there said, "The advantage of sericulture is that it gives us work the whole year, unlike agriculture, which is seasonal."

Over the border in Tamilnadu, the Commission visited a sericulture farm in Coimbatore district. Fifteen hundred acres of land has been allotted to 200 farmers. They each cultivate 1/2 an acre in mulberry. Women are involved here in cultivating mulberry, rearing cocoons, and selling them. They are harvesting six crops a year here. "The women involved in rearing are very careful and alert and skilled," the extension worker said. "By seeing them though, the landless feel at a loss."

Spinning is done in a workshed, where men and women are segregated. Only 20% women are being trained in this work, although on private farms in the area this work is performed completely by women.

"I was sent to observe this government training centre and for that I had to learn cycling," the extension worker shyly told the Commission. She is an SCC pass woman, living alone in a small village. "Women come to me for advice, and now men have also begun to come to me for advice on their children's education."

In Punjab's Gurdaspur district there are sericulture extension workers and one Rural Development Agency's plant for silk reeling. Till now, there are no women extension workers there.

In Assam, at Gauhati, where women do everything from cultivation to weaving, they complained about the emergence of middlemen at every stage of the silk production process. "Unlike before, because of these middlemen, we no longer know where to sell our finished cloth. And even if we do know we cannot sell it easily, because of our lack of capital. And loans to women are rare and difficult to get."

## MINING

When the Commission went to visit the Eastern Coal Mines at Raniganj in West Bengal, they met a 62 year old woman shalepicker who had been working at this occupation for more than 50 years. Gira



Women are keen to take advantage of labour saving devices like bicycles for commuting and protective devices like head gears which are normally not available.

related her history to the Commission members. Her story illustrates women's displacement by mechanisation from their occupations in mining and how legislation has not only not protected them, but is actually pushing them out of work. The current state of affairs is that everything underground belongs to the domain of the principal employer, and his workers are protected. All underground workers are men. Everything on the surface is given out to a contractor, who hires only casual labour, the majority of whom are women.

Giria began her story by saying that there had been problem getting regular work here in the old days. She used to bring many women to get work here. When the British owned the mines, a large number of women worked underground. Now she only does shale picking, and the number of women workers has gone down greatly. Many years back she used to get Rs. 200/- per month. Now she earns Rs. 1000/- "if I do not get sick."

She did not remember exactly when she began working in the mines, but she thought she was about ten. Her two brothers were close to her in age. One brother was left home to care for their land. They came with their aunt and uncle. They used to all work shoulder to shoulder underground. There was nothing bad about it, "she said. She worked with her brother and one uncle who later died in jail during the freedom struggle. The men dug, and women and children carried the coal. In the wartime they worked hard for more production, and they earned more. "Many women worked underground," Giria said, "I do not know who thought of it. Was that Gandhi Bapu?"

In the British days, when there were hordes of women workers, some of them were under the malik, and some under the contractor. They all had the same working conditions in terms of hours of work and wages. Then some of the women were taken up by the malik. Giria was the unfortunate one to be left out. She remained with the contractor. The government forced the malik to protect their workers, but the contractors were not forced to do anything for them. Also, the unions protect the malik's workers, but they do not come to protect the contractor's workers.

"For many years, I lived with the hope that the malik might absorb me. That malik is now the government itself," she told the Commission. As times progressed while she was left with the

the kedar, her brother was taken up in the mines as organized labour. He gradually rose to a position with a fixed salary, housing, schooling for children, and even travel allowance. He bought some shops in the town from his savings. Now his son is a technician in the Railways. "They swam through the poverty, while I stayed here at the mercy of the contractor," she complained.

She said her sons are not educated and they are "good for nothing fellows." She works while they enjoy themselves. Her husband who was working in the mines, died of old age.

Her third brother was left to look after their land and trees. But the trees were all cut and sold and the land mortgaged. Now it is gone from their hands, and he is a landless labourer. He works in the agriculture season at Rs. 10/- day, and in the off season goes to Calcutta to pull a rickshaw for a master. He has contracted T.B. in the process. Garia helps support him as well as her sons.

"Why do you think there is the discrimination between men underground and women on the surface?" the Commission asked.

She replied, "The maliks say that they have to close down mines because labour is costly. Yet the contractors keep getting fatter and fatter. What the logic is, I do not understand.

"Now we hear that even this surface work will be ended, because the conveyor belt with displace loaders further. Is this true?" she asked the Commission members.

We were told by the official that of the total 1,18,000 workers at ECML, 8 per cent are women. Thirty per cent of the women workers are casual labour. There are three types of mines there—pit mines, inclined mines, open cast mines. Before mechanization, women graded coal, threw waste, picked shale, and headloaded coal. Though they are much fewer numbers today, they still do shale picking, loading and breaking the coal to dust. Casual labour women are paid on a piece rate basis and belong to open cast mines. They are paid Rs. 45 for loading 4.5 tonnes into wagons. That money is divided by the four or five labourers who share the work, and it takes them about five hours to load one wagon. The Commission also found women working at the mines serving in the canteens, making clay cartridges, sweeping, carrying domestic coal and as ash-kamin and general kamin.

Seventy-two women came to meet the Commission from the Amritnagar Colliery. Bahuban Bibi was a headloader from Doomka district in Bihar. She had lost all the hair on the top of her head from headloading. She earns Rs. 600/- per month. She spends Rs. 150 on her children's school fees and Rs. 50 on house rent. That leaves her Rs. 400 to support her six children and herself. Her husband died from asthma. She said headloading was very strenuous work, and that she wanted higher work. "But there is no such work available for women in these mines," she complained.

Sonakali Devi reports similar circumstances. Her husband died of T.B. while working in the mines. She thinks she also has it. She starts at 4 p.m. doing wagon loading, and works till 12 or 1 p.m. when the wagon is loaded. Then she goes home to care for her five children. The wagons only arrive three days in a week, and she is paid on piece-rate. Her priorities were 'lighter work' and a 'pension.'

Another woman who works with her, Punmasi Panda, has to bring her two year old son with her while she works. And Kumari barely manages to support her six daughters on the Rs. 375/ month that she makes headloading. Julie, a shale picker, said many women took 'voluntary retirement' under some pressure, and gave the jobs to their sons, but have since regretted their choice, because "the sons are of their wives, not their mothers who helped them get the job, and now they have lost their wages"

There were some obvious divisions in this meeting, first between shale pickers and headloaders. The shale pickers are in the privileged position. Their work is lighter, and they want to protect this position. The second division was amongst the headloaders themselves. The majority of them were tribals, used to doing heavy labour. A few were more middle class widows, whose husbands had been killed working in the mines. As per the policy, they were given jobs. They were not used to manual labour, and complained loudly that the work was too difficult. Even though they were a minority, they talked the most. They gave a biased view to the discussion, because the majority of headloaders were not unhappy with their jobs.

All these women belonged to the union. Their union fees were regularly deducted from their wages, but they did not seem to have much contact with the union.

The Commission asked the women some general questions about underground work, and operating machines—two jobs women have been kept out of. The tribal women so far had not spoken.

But their eyes shone, showing their eagerness to do either job. One tough one said, "Yes, I can operate the machines if I am trained." But generally, it seemed that they were inhibited by the presence of the other women, the management officials, who were present.

At the close of their meeting, Santhosh Matora, a 30 year-old wagon loader from Bihar stood up to talk. She said she had passed the SSC and knows typing, but since her husband's death has had to take up this work to support her three children. The union helped her get his job, but she said she wanted a job appropriate for her skills.

The Commission had invited union representatives to attend the meeting, but none of them showed up. Later the Commission met them by chance in the canteen, and tried to probe into their stand on these women workers. They answered them flatly:

"There is very little work for women."

"Women have welcomed the idea of voluntary retirement."

"Our Workers Education Classes are not successful because of lack of interest on the part of the workers. We started tailoring classes, but it did not work."

"Illiteracy is the result of their backwardness."

The wives of the management officers sincerely wanted to do some good work with these women, but they were at a loss about what to do.

The Commission visited the Chrome Charge Project at Brahmani Pal, Keonjar district, where all the chromium and iron alloys are produced and exported to Japan. The women at this alloy's Plant were involved in sizing and grading the chromium and iron in the open sun. There was no roof over their workplace. Santhals and other tribals and many unmarried young girls were involved in this work.

Karmi has worked there for one year shifting materials for Rs. 12.70/ day. She told the Commission that she felt the working conditions were very poor. "Even the slippers we have to buy, and they do not even last a month. There is so much walking inside the plant, as well as commuting from the village." She had heard of gloves to be used for handling the rough material, and she demanded that they be provided.

Pansuri Devi agrees that the working conditions are difficult, but she prefers this work because it is regular all year round, unlike the agricultural work at home. She is a Santhal, working as a grader here while her mother-in-law cares for her two children.

There were 800 workers at this plant, 300 of which are contract workers. They all wished for some medical facilities for themselves and their old family members.

At the Daitory Mines in the Bali Parvat hills, only processing work is done. It is a totally mechanized plant. There are 35 women working in the office, and then women working in loading-contract work. For loading 15 tonnes in a truck, men earn Rs. 14 while women get Rs. 12. These women have always worked on construction, not mines.

In Daitory, the women first have to walk 5-6 kms. to load trucks. They get Rs. 14/ truck, but they divide it amongst seven headloaders (men and women get equal shares). Some days there is only one truck to load, some days two or three. Their priority was "more trucks," i.e. more work.

At the OMC chromite mines at Kaliapani, Sukinda, the Commission saw the biggest open mines in the country. The management said that there were 1198 piece-rate workers, 140 of whom are women. But the Commission members saw a great deal more than that working on the surface. A gang of 15-25 work together breaking chrome pieces and loading and unloading. These Santhal women cycle to and from their village to work.

When the Commission met them, their heads were covered with muddy checked towels and dirty white helmets. They wore rubber shoes on their feet and had thin, sinewy, strong bodies, black skin, and muddy hands. They were cheerful and joked with one another while they talked to the Commission.

Sukanti is a landless woman whose husband looks after three children while she does this work. On piece-rate, she earned Rs. 450 last month.

Shrimati bought a bicycle from her wages for Rs. 630. Now on the bike she brings her husband who also works here. She earned Rs. 350 for ten days last month. There is a creche there with 15 children. She did not get any maternity benefits, but her union did help get a bonus last year. She would like to

keep cattle, but there is no place in her house; and she cannot show any asset to the bank (except her bicycle) for taking a loan.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Commission visited the Bhilai Steel Plant and Iron Ore Mines. Of the total workforce, of 13000, 3700 were regular employees, including 200 women (less than 5%); 1300 more women work on piece rate, and 2600 more under contractor. Women do scrapping and wagon loading. The permanent women work in creche, canteen, as water carriers, but none in any technical jobs. The Labour Officer said they have had only two cases of maternity so far because most of the women are over 40. He also said, "Since manual mining is very costly, the Labour Department has introduced mechanization. That is the policy from the top, so we have not been recruiting new women for two years now."

The senior union leader for this mine confirmed this policy when the Commission met him where he was hospitalized. He said, "The first victims of mechanization in the plant are women. Then at home, they are pressurized to voluntarily retire in favour of men. We wrote to other women's organizations to incite them to take action against this practice. It is a difficult issue for us. The women who do not agree to retire are retrenched, and then their post is not filled. If they retire, then the job will be given to one of their male family members. Thus the union has to partially support the policy so that jobs will not be lost with women's departure."

He also said that mechanization did not save the mining industry money. He said, "Donapri mines, Bilaspur, and Nandini mines all have a large number of women. They are paid Rs. 10-15 per day, instead of the Rs. 35-40 the mine has to pay one man to operate the Pockland mechanized shovel. The machine is costlier under any circumstances, and every three months, new machines are arriving."

Then he mentioned a more distant effect of the mass unemployment occurring since the introduction of these machines. "This high number of unemployed get discontented, and there is a great deal of tension in the town. The union is made responsible for it, and violence often breaks out. These people just simply need work."

A representative of the women workers from Hirri Mines Bilaspur, came to meet the Commission. Ansuyabai and her 200 women co-workers were forced out of work, while their husbands were regularised and transferred to Bhilai on the condition that wives accepted "voluntary" retirement. Formerly, both she and her husband were piece-rate workers.

## **TOBACCO AND BIDI WORKERS**

After agriculture, the bidi and tobacco processing sector employs the largest number of women workers in the country. Some collect the tendu leaves from the forest and sell them to traders. Others are engaged in tobacco processing. They dry the leaves, cut or grind them, mix them with oil so they will remain moist, grade them, bag them, and load, unload, and stack them, in their transportation routes to bidi and cigarette manufacturers. Most of the women involved in this industry are bidi rollers. The majority of them carry out this work at home. Their work consists of acquiring the materials, cutting the tendu leaves, filling them with tobacco, folding the ends, tying them closed with thread, and binding them into bundles of a given size. The rolling and folding is a skilled job which takes an average of six months for a woman or child to learn expertly. In some places the last process is also in the women's hands—the packaging and labelling of the bidi.

Bidi and tobacco is the one sector where comprehensive legislation is in place, aimed at protecting women labourers. The main two Acts covering their employment condition are the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, and the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act. The fact of this legislation, though, and its implementation, are two very divergent realities. According to these laws, it is the responsibility of the principal employer to pay his workers a minimum wage, to provide creche and medical facilities, to give maternity benefits, and to register the worker for provident fund and scholarship benefits. Home-based workers are also eligible for these benefits. The following accounts of the Commission's meetings with these workers, though, will illustrate how blatantly disregarded these laws are in practice.

In most places the Commission found that the manufacturers have adopted a contract system in bidi production. Any given manufacturer employs between two and 600 contractors. Large contractors in turn hire subcontractors. Despite the statutory minimum wage fixed in each state, contractors set



their own lower wage rate when contracting women to do the work. This is just the beginning point of their exploitation, however. The raw materials they deliver to the workers are almost always under weight. Therefore the women always produce fewer bidis than the number the contractor has assigned them. The women have to pay from their wages for the number of bidis lacking—usually 10%-30% of their daily wage. On top of this, contractors practise a fixed deduction of Rs. 2 per week, and then proceed to reject 5%-20% of the finished bidis as defectively rolled. They indiscriminately make this rejection claim even from women who have been rolling bidi for 20 years! And of course, they still claim all the rejected bidis. The findings of a study done by a voluntary organisation on bidi workers in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, were shared with the Commission. They revealed the typical carving away of women's wages through fraud:

Daily expenses/losses under contract system:

Tendu leaf shortage	Rs. 1.20/1000 bidi (average)
Tobacco shortage	Rs. 0.60/1000
Deduction Rs. 2/week	Rs. 0.30/1000
Rejected bidi	Rs. 0.50-2/1000
Thread costs	Rs. 0.15./1000
Daily loss total	Rs. 2.75—4.25
Minimum Wage in M.P.	Rs. 10.50/1000 bidis (1 day's work)
Contractor's Stated wage	Rs. 7-10/1000

Amount Actually Received After Deduction—Rs. 4-7/1000

The Commission met these kinds of reports in every state where they visited bidi rollers. They found women usually receiving about half of the minimum wage under these ploys. Because the primary employer does not want to comply with the requirements of the law, he is virtually impossible to trace. Most women work for two or three different contractors at a time. They are not asked to sign when they receive payment. They are registered, so the employer will not have to provide maternity benefits. They change the falsified name every few months. They deduct provident fund from the women's wages, but give no receipts. In Tamilnadu, only 20% of the collected provident funds are officially recorded—half under bogus names.

In the Vellore siume to Tamilnadu there is a city of 20,000 homebased bidi workers. One woman, Rukmani, said that they get 1 kg. tobacco from the contractor who expects 1500 bidis in return. They only can make 1250 bidi out of this amount of raw material. The rate is of Rs. 11.60/1000 bidi, but The grind of work continues till the fag end.





because they have to replenish the shortfall, they make only Rs. 8-9/day. The men go to the mandi to buy the raw material, so the women have demanded a separate cell where they can go to buy it themselves.

Another woman who works with her in the slum is Gulzar Begum. She said she has difficulty supporting her family on Rs. 8/day, so she often has to take loans from the money-lender. He charges her Rs. 1/day on a Rs. 10 loan. She said that her children—and most of the children of bidi workers—start rolling bidis by the age of five years. She also complained that T.B. was rampant amongst them.

Lalitha is one of the women who labels the bidi packets. She does the work at home, and usually labels 10,000 packets per day. She is paid 40 paise/1000 labels, but she has to buy her own gum and thread, so she actually earns only 30 paise/1000, or Rs. 3/day. She also borrows at Rs. 1/day on Rs. 10. During an economic crisis, she had to give her daughter to the contractor for a loan of Rs. 350. The daughter was required to go and work at his place everyday from 6 a.m., for the entire day. Because so little food is given, the children have to carry their own. They do special jobs like folding the corners of the bidi at the rate of Rs. 1.50/1000. Out of this meagre amount, 50 paise are deducted as the interest of the loan.

Lalitha got her daughter freed of this "bonded labour" by taking a loan from the Malir Mangalam women's organization, which she had joined, and paying the contractor off. This organisation has helped many other women relieve the contracts on their young children after reports came that these children were beaten and abused in this master's house.

Another labeler, Savitri, also has great difficulty supporting her family. She does double work each day so that she can earn Rs. 10. Her husband was drinking half of her wages each day until he died of alcoholism. "Some days I cannot even buy rice!" she sobbed. "And if we demand more wages, the contractor will stop our work!"

The women's organisation there runs this loans/savings unit where the Commission members met some children who had been "bonded". Raghu's mother had taken a loan Rs. 300 which forced him into the work of folding 15000 bidis a day. "Children's fingers are small and pointed, and so especially good for this delicate task." He earned Rs. 6/day, from which Rs. 4 was deducted as repayment to the loan. He complained of backache and T.B. He looked about 13. He now studies in the morning at the centre run by the organization.

When other children heard him telling his story, they started bragging to the Commission members, "I can label 20,000 in one day!!" Another said he was working off a Rs. 2000 loan his mother took.

Then the group leaders of the bidi workers complained strongly to the Commission about the insulting behaviour of subcontractors. "They all treat us unfairly, and it is a lot of trouble working for two or three different contractors in one week."

The priorities of these women were: access to regular work, and access to health facilities. They all had ration cards.

In Madhya Pradesh the Commission found that women were also under these kind of wage constraints, but had been so brainwashed by the contractors that they often accepted the exploitation unconsciously. Even if they actually received only Rs. 4 after all the contractor's deductions, they would answer "Rs. 7" when the Commission asked about their wages. In a village 20 km. from Jabalpur, a community of Muslim women were engaged in bidi work. They looked extremely poor. All were afraid of the contractors.

One woman, Fatamabi, told the Commission that her children help her at rolling work. Her 11 year old daughter can roll 300 bidi every day. Fatamabi complained of the perpetual shortage of tobacco, bad leaves, and high rate of rejection 200/1000. She said her payment is often delayed by 2-3 weeks. Her signature is never taken, and she is not given a log book. Her identity card was given to her in her son's name. There is no medical clinic near the village. She said they had heard about a medical van for bidi workers, but no one has seen it yet. When the Commission asked her about bonus, housing, scholarships, and minimum wage, she answered, "No..No..No..No.." It was difficult to compute her real wage because of all the complex deductions, but it seemed to be Rs. 5/1000. She was one of 30 bidi rollers in the compound of the Panchayat who reported similar hardships. Their priorities were 'no

cheating' by the employers, and 'please' health services!

In another village in this district, Sihora 100 bidi workers gathered to meet the Commission. They have been rolling bidi for 50 years in the village, yet there is no history of a union or even a sporadic hartal, despite the fact they earn less than Rs. 4/day. All of them are landless. Here too, the identity cards are in the name of men. They complained that their employers would not sign on the scholarship forms for their children (under the welfare rules) and the teachers also charge Rs. 5 per form for a signature. A mobile medical van does come to this village, but only irregularly, and it charges Rs. 3 for an injection and Rs. 2 for medicines. The women were afraid at this meeting, and one said, "Since we have met you today and talked, we may not get work for next 15 days." If they are this vulnerable, how will they ever get the contractor to comply with the legislation, that is supposed to protect them?

In another town the Commission met with bidi workers who have been struggling to establish a cooperative for almost two years. They told the Commission their woes of registration in detail. Their chief organizer began the story:

"When we started holding group meetings to discuss the possibility of starting a co-op of 500 women, the contractors refused to give work to us. Our husband did not support our idea because they had no faith in our seriousness in this venture. We got exhausted by answering hundreds of queries put before us by the funding department. Then the building...

"We selected one in the big market complex which had been lying vacant for the last two years. But when we demanded it, the Municipal authorities showed total apathy. Some official had been arrested for corruption, or something like that, so they did not pay any attention to us. The matter was not raised at the board meeting, so no decision could be made. We did not know how to get these things done.

"Finally some bureaucratic pressure was exerted from above, and a favourable decision was given. We were glad. In the meantime, the Chairman of the Board changed. Then we learned that the decision to allot that building to us was not recorded in the minutes of the Board meeting. 'How do we know that was decided? What can we do?' the other bureaucrats said.

"Again, some pressure was applied from the state government, so we finally got the building. But then, the problems of registration began!

At this point, the field worker took up the story: "Numerous forms had to be filled out. It was very tedious. For a 20-member society, a total of 600 signatures had to be collected! Then all these thumb impressions had to be further attested. Oh, I did not know that! They should have told me before, at last all the forms were completed and we submitted them to the Department. After one month the inspector came and asked us to do alterations in the bye laws. We did everything. Yet a few weeks later, a list of queries were sent. Our chief organizer answered them all clearly. Still no action was taken. Throughout this whole process no one took us seriously. We would do our part, then everything would stop. It finally dawned on us, 'Aahna! We have not made bribes and gifts. We would not. Again we had to bring bureaucratic pressure from Bhopal.

"Within minutes, the co-op. was registered. But still minor harassments continued."

The chief organizer said, "One day, the Inspector came at 4.30 p.m., and insisted on verifying all the members. They had to be collected from their homes. Another Inspector refused to submit the report until he was 'satisfied'. Attempts to collect bribes still continue, and there is no secret about it.

"Once they realized that bribes were not coming from these women, they resorted to other strategies. Excuses like 'officer transferred', 'substitute on leave' or 'peon's bicycle broken,' and many others. Thus everything kept being delayed.

"Then the Inspectors were also trying to use the facilities at the Project Office for their personal work, like getting their typing done free of cost.

"Then our experience with the Cooperative Bank was also disappointing. Though six accounts were opened, the inefficiency was intolerable."

One member of the proposed co-op, who was at the meeting said, "First of all nobody believes that it is a genuine society—not even the Cooperative Department. They refuse to work without bribes and harass us in every possible way. Secondly, there are too many unnecessary rules and procedures for getting registered. Thirdly, when the Inspectors became disgruntled because we would not pay them

off, they resorted to inciting our women against the cooperative. This raised doubts in the minds of many women and because of their past experiences with fraud and deceit in the outside world, it was easy to believe they might be cheated again.

"You see—the Government acts negatively on one side. The contractors and the inspectors who get bribes from them spread negative messages on the other side. How can one small group of women survive in this environment? The culture of our town is full of goondaism. Nothing honest can work in our city."

The chief organizer concluded the story by saying, "Until today, our problems of production have not been solved. We have yet to get the license from the excise department, and after that there is the sales tax number. Who knows what harassments are in store for us?"

"All of our enthusiasm for having our own production unit has vanished. We have become the laughing stock of the city, and we feel strangled. But even without enthusiasm, we will not give up. You will see us making bidi from this place!"

After this meeting the Commission met with the Madhya Pradesh State officials in Bhopal. They described to the Chief Secretary and the Labour Commissioner some of their tour observations. In this discussion, the problems faced by bidi workers came up. The Labour Commissioner was familiar with these problems. He immediately joined the discussion, saying, "Yes, these bidi traders are so strong, so wealthy—the workers are too weak to fight them. What can we even do? The workers cannot bear the loss of income or work for even a few days. The traders are so wealthy and so stubborn, they are willing to keep the shops closed for months together."

One Commission member said, "Then what is the answer? If you cannot enforce legislation, if they are so powerful, what is the answer for these women?"

"They should form a cooperative," he replied.

"Will the government be ready to sell their bidis (like they do for handloom co-op)?" she asked.

"How! The government could not sell bidis!" he said.

"If the government think they are not strong enough to fight these traders, you think these women can fight them!" she asked.

Some unionized bidi workers whom the Commission met had come closer to achieving fair labour practices for themselves than the unorganized women. One such example was encountered in Ahmedabad city in Gujarat. Godavari Padmashali, the President of 4500-member union said, "After seven years of union agitation, we have reached up to the wage of Rs. 12/1000 bidi. Still this is short of the minimum wage, which is Rs. 13.40. Here, at least, all the members have I.D. Cards, access to the medical centre, scholarships, and other welfare services. And there is going to be a housing colony for 200 members of the union, assisted by CSWB and HUDCO."

"The worst thing is this 'sale-purchase' system the employers are beginning to adopt. Once again they will evade giving us any benefits. How can we catch the 'choti' of the principal employers? He is not to be seen anywhere!"

This sale-purchase system refers to a new practice that the Commission saw gaining ground in Rajasthan and M.P., as well as where it started from Gujarat. It entails the women actually 'purchasing' the raw materials from the contractor. When her bidi are rolled, she 'sells' them back to the same contractor. The system will reject up to 30% of her products; of course, the contractor still appropriates then rejects (despite the fact that she owns the raw materials); and it relieves itself from all responsibility for fair labour practices prescribed under law.

One woman in Mahsana district, Kulsumbibi, described the evils of this system in their village of Patan. "We only get Rs. 6 or 7 for a thousand bidis when we sell them back to the 'Thekedar' (contractor). He receives Rs. 22-23 for them! When they started this sale-purchase system, he tore up my I.D. Card."

One Commission member asked, "What about the union? Cannot they help you?"

She replied, "I am not allowed to join the union because the sub-contractor is my brother-in-law's brother-in-law, and they are our neighbours."

The women in Patan who are members of the union receive Rs. 10/1000, and they all have I.D. Cards.

Another trend which makes it difficult for the bidi workers to be organized in any fashion is the ever-increasing closure rate of factories. At Aurangabad in Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra, the Commission met a depressed lot of 400 workers in one factory. They were getting Rs. 11/1000, but no creche or maternity benefits. (Actually, a 'creche' sign was hung over one room, but it was full of women rolling bidi and no children.) Every month Rs. 625 is taken from their wages in the name of the provident fund, but they have never been given a receipt for this. Now their employer is trying to push them out of the factory to work in their homes. Besides pushing them into their homes, they are encouraging the women to take up the business of sub-contracting to other women. So these women have begun earning Rs. 2/1000 bidi from others' labour, by applying the same practices they know so well from their own subcontractor.

An old woman, Sakubai, said she had once seen 2000 workers in her factory. Today there are only 25.

"Where have they all gone?" a Commission member asked.

"Home", she replied, promptly.

A Pune woman, Vijaya Jagannath gave a similar report. She said that in the last 14 years, all the Pune factories but one have closed down. She is working in this one, and receives Rs. 11/1000 bidi (mini. wage Rs. 15.), but said that home workers were getting only Rs. 6-7/1000.

The Commission found rural women reporting the most oppressive circumstances.

In Panagar village, Janpad panchayat, M.P., women reported earning Rs. 3-4 per day. When they demanded higher wages, the contractors stopped giving work for 15 days. It was only thanks to the local Free Legal Aid Committee which intervened, that the workers were reinstated. The FLAC came to know about the problem from a junior officer whose mother's work had stopped.

The contractor of the bidi rollers belongs to their own caste, so they cannot speak out against him. If women have I.D. cards, they are in the names of their sons or some unknown male. One woman here told the Commission, "I have been rolling bidi since I was eight."

Tribals in M.P. fare even worse. In Raipur district they are paid Rs. 2.50/1000, and their children get Rs. 1.25. Often they are not paid at all. They organized a 'morcha' of 300 workers, but have not seen any result yet.

Some of these tribals collect tendu leaves for bidi production. The Forest Development Corporation rate is Rs. 8/1000 leaves, but usually when the women walk the long distance to the depot to sell their collections, they find it closed.

"Even if they are open, they usually make some excuse and ask us to wait or come next time," one woman complained. "Then we are forced to sell them to the trader at a very low rate."

They also told the Commission that this same trader buys other forest items like 'chironjee'—a very expensive spice that sells for Rs. 60/kg. in the market—from the tribals by bartering the same quantity of salt!

A tribal from the Sabarkantha district sells the tendu leaves she collects at the rate of Rs. 7/5000 leaves. She has no idea about their market value. She said there is no advantage in selling them to the Forest Development Corporation as it also offers very low rates, and is far from their village. She is a member of a Forest Workers Union. She said her priority was a fair price for the leaves. The Commission asked her, "Could you roll bidis if the tobacco powder was supplied to you?"

She replied, "No! we are the birds of the open sky, we cannot sit home for long hours everyday. The day I do not see the face of Jungledada (Fatherforest), food has no taste for me! Instead of tobacco, give us cows!"

A Rajasthani tribal woman from Madu village believes conditions are better for those people selling leaves in Gujarat. She only receives Rs. 3 per day for 1000 leaves. "If I had my way, I would go to the border of Gujarat and sell them where they pay a better price."

Usually, though, this theory works in reverse. The reality is that if a contractor can pay some other labourer less wages, he will take the work or buy supplies there. Women in Gujarat often said they could not agitate for higher wages, because the contractors would simply take the work over the state borders where desperate women will take up the work at an even lower rate.

It is revealing to look into some of the women's personal circumstances, to understand from what

level of motivation they are operating. In Jabalpur city many women are supporting their entire family solely on bidi wages. Twenty-one years old Shakila is one woman trying to support her nine member family on this small amount. Her parents are very old, and there is no brother in the family. When all her six sisters help, they can earn Rs. 13/day. She is unusual in the community because she is educated up to B.A. IIIrd year. She also runs Adult Education classes, but in three years she has only been remunerated three times, a very small amount, with no allowance for class rent or electricity charges. She is not unusual in her frustrations, though: "I feel so angry about receiving such low wages, but I am helpless. I cannot afford to be angry, much less to strike."

Amongst Jabalpur bidi families, the child mortality rate of children under two years is as high as 26.5% in the Muslim community and 23% in the Hindu community. Sixty two per cent school age children go to school, the rest drop out to roll bidi and help the family. Forty-five per cent of these families earn less than Rs. 400/month. The 24% who earn more than Rs. 700 do so because there is a man in the family with a permanent job, or because they are nine member or larger families, with everyone working in bidi production. Families with more children earn a higher income not per capita, but their gross income amounts to more. Sixty per cent of these families depend solely on their bidi wage for survival. Fifty per cent are illiterate, but they all aspire to educate their children. Sixty-one per cent own their kuchha houses, but 91% have no savings.

Their health is poor. Twenty per cent are seriously ill with asthma or T.B. or bronchitis. Forty per cent have been sterilized, but they report poststerilization problems of excessive bleeding, severe pain, and irregular menstrual cycles. Most of them suffer from anaemia, body aches, and dizziness from constant exposure to the tobacco dust.

The Union that serves these women presented a memorandum to the Commission, outlining their complaints which are violating the law. It was one of six such memorandums which the Commission received from Jabalpur, Bombay, Nipani, Ahmednagar, Ahmedabad and Pune. Besides calling their employers on the shortages of raw materials, lack of legitimate records, lack of welfare benefits, unreasonable rejection rate, and the illegal contract system, each memorandum mentioned some complaint specific to their area.

The Tirunelveli District Bidi Workers Union not only blamed the three "tycoons"—Ganesh, 30 Number Photo, and Sadhu bidi industries, but also complained against the Karnataka Labour department. They claim that the Labour Department is in absolute collusion with the manufacturers, and therefore will not take any action for all the frauds they perpetuate against bidi workers. Their main plea was to stop the contract system all together, and reinstate workers' legal rights. One problem they mentioned about women being registered in a brother's or husband's or son's name was that when the supposed man or boy died, the women could then no longer get work. And if any provident funds were granted, they went to all of the dead male's male relatives, and the woman worker never saw any of it.

The Nipani memorandum was adamant about closing down the Kiran Tobacco Company—a factory where mechanized equipment is displacing tobacco processors from their much needed jobs. The Commission visited the old factory in Nipani, where about 200 workers were employed. They receive Rs. 13/day—the minimum wage. The women operated big and small machines which cut and grade the tobacco. They were articulate, knowledgeable workers, who had been union members for ten years. They spoke with unanimous consent about how the numbers of women and the amount of work had declined since these machines had arrived.

Radhabai Patil, the local union leader confirmed that now there is only seven to eight months of work, while they used to get twelve. Besides the mechanization, the factory has begun to farm out work to rural areas, at much lower wages. One woman complained, "We middle-aged women are under constant pressure to submit our resignation."

At a later meeting with these union members in the Municipal Councillors' Meeting Hall, other trade groups as well as representatives of employers were present. These employers' representatives claimed that the working conditions had improved due to mechanization, "because all the dust from hammer-beating was now eliminated"

The women all said, "No, that is not true. Because of the machines the tobacco dust blows all around and gets in our lungs." This was the first of many heated arguments.

The employers complained that bidi production is decreasing because of loose and unbranded bidis made available in the market, so they are unable to give employment round the year. (There has been a 35% retrenchment since 1985.)

Disagreement also followed this, and one worker asked angrily, "Why is it that there was always full time work until we got organized into a union? Why not now? Why has it been announced 'seasonal' now?" The women are suspicious that their work has been framed into less organized sectors.

It was raining heavily outside, and Radhybai Patil stood up to present the workers memorandum. She told the gist of it to the meeting: "Close down the Kiran Tobacco Company which is a 'Rakshasa' demon who will wipe out the entire working force in Nipani. The machines must be made so costly by taxes that the employers cannot afford them. Why should the Government fund such machines that render us unemployed?"

The Commission visited the place in Gujarat where these notorious made tobacco processing machines are sold. The visit was accorded them thanks to the Labour Commissioner who travelled with the Commission throughout the state. (Gujarat was the only state where the government had turned the Commissions programme over to the Labour Department, instead of the Social Welfare Department). The machines are set up and operating in the 'Shrirang' factory in Vallabhvidyanagar, Kaira district. Their technician said that this machine can triple the production capacity of a manual worker.

The Commission reached the factory at 7 a.m. and saw all the men and boy workers. This factory had 61 male workers. If the processing were hand done, it would employ 250 female workers. The production was not in full swing. It looked like their interest in this plant was mainly to sell the machines, not actual production. They have sold these machines to Kiran in Nipani, and probably other places in Maharashtra. Because of the Nipani Union and the Labour Ministry's concern, they were feeling agitated.

The technician angrily said, "One Nipani union (cursing them) has made a big issue of it, and now we have visitors all the time. Why do you not go to district Baroda where there is a completely automatic machine?"

When the Commission was in this district, they also visited some manual tobacco processors of Chikodra village. There are many such factories in the Anand taluka. Women there earn Rs. 7/day for working from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Before, they earned only Rs. 5, but they joined a union and raised a demand for Rs. 10/day, so they stopped the factory. After a 10-month legal battle, they were reinstated for Rs. 7. One woman working there, Shantaben, complained that her son had been fired from work in the fields because she had participated in the union activities.

"Why, your son? What did he had to do with it?" a Commission member asked.

"Ha! The same people own the tobacco fields, the tobacco factories, the bidi shops. Not just here, but all over India. They are all relatives. How can we ever deal with them?"

## HOMEBASED OCCUPATIONS

### Handlooms: Weavers Spinners

Geeta is a master weaver of West Bengal's famous Tangail saris. She is somewhat unusual in her village, because most of the master weavers there are men. She learned this skill from her father, because he was growing blind and she had no brother to learn it from him. She was sitting at her large pitloom as she told the Commission members her story and demonstrated her skill on the sky-blue sari she was working on. Because of economic pressures in her family, she began this weaving work when she was nine. She is literate, and she married into a weaver's family that does coarse weaving work. After her marriage (when she was 15) she taught her husband how to do this fine Tangail work. Now they have three sons and two daughters, and the eldest daughter (who is seventeen years old) helps them. She does the starching and warping. One of her sons weaves. They have three looms. Geeta, who is now 33, works every day from 8 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. She takes breaks from the weaving only to cook food or to prepare materials for weaving. The three weavers and one assistant can earn Rs. 250/- week, collectively. They are not members of a weaving cooperative. She works for the "Mahajan", and owes him money for a loan, so she cannot join the cooperative. But she likes working for the Mahajan. From

him she could borrow the Rs. 4000/- she needed. She has already repaid half of it.

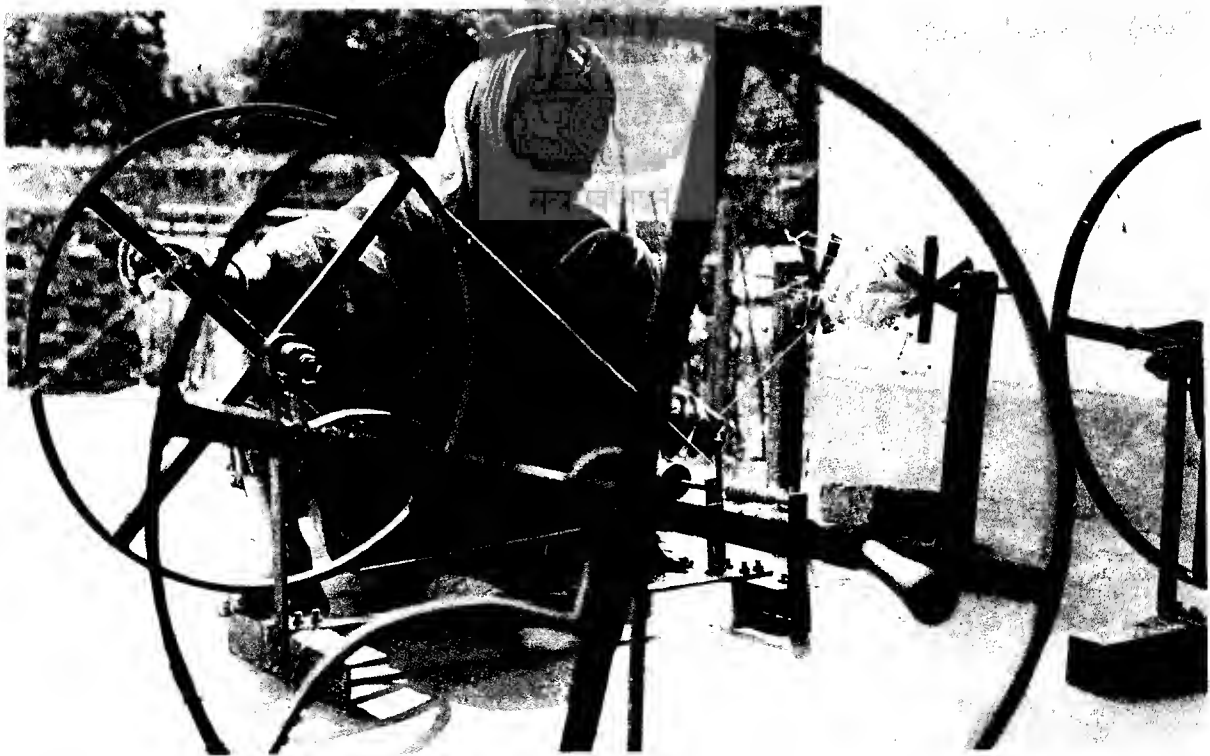
She never leaves her weaving work, except during the last part of pregnancy. She was not enthusiastic for more training. She was smiling while she talked and while her shuttle was flying, but she seemed spent. "This work is so strenuous that without the economic pressures of continuing the work, nobody would like to do this work after doing it for five years. And training will not change the way these looms work." Her priorities instead were her children's education, and her daughters' marriage.

Geeta's situation is typical of that of many women who are part of weaving families. It is accepted within these communities that women may sit at the loom, but this usually only occurs when there is severe economic pressure to do so. If the male weaver of the family has died or is absent, it is easier for a woman to get access to the loom. This situation is apparent in Geeta's daughters' circumstances. She, like many women in weaving families, helps do all the preparation work—the sizing, the warping, the beam preparation. If she was in a Khadi-weaver's family she would also do the spinning. But she does not sit at the loom, because she has a brother. These pre-weaving material preparations are very time consuming and are an essential part of a good quality finished product. Yet they pass unrecognized as a skill, and women get very little remuneration for doing any of these pre-weaving jobs.

Geeta's relationship to the cooperative also reveals a common attitude women weavers express. They cannot easily take loans from the cooperative, while the money lender extends such services to them readily. Also, the trader pays a weaver promptly when he receives the cloth, while it might take several weeks of delay if she was selling through the cooperative. Another big problem for women weavers in relation to the cooperatives is that many weavers' cooperatives do not accept women members. Or, if they do, they often do not recognise a woman as a weaver if she only practises the pre-weaving skills of warping, sizing, dying and spinning. Thus she remains ineligible for cooperative benefits despite her large participation in the weaving process. At the same time, no matter which jobs she does, she can deal with the trader itself.

In Geeta's community of 70,000 Tangail weavers who are mostly refugees from Bangladesh, 15% of the women are actually weavers. All the women do the preparatory work of sizing, warping and dying. Forty per cent of the weavers in Phulia were members of cooperatives. But to become a member you

The wheel of work.





must meet the precondition of owing your own loom. Very few women do. Two cooperatives the Commission visited here had 25% women listed on their membership register. When the Commission asked some women whose names were listed, they said they did not know they were cooperative members.

Kalyani was under a tree outside her house, almost in the street, when the Commission members walked by. She was squatting, vigorously kneading cooked rice into enough cotton yarn to make one sari. This is the Tangail sari's speciality. People say "the starch will remain until the sari dies!" about these saris. It is a difficult job to work the 200 grams of rice into every fibre of the 250 grams of yarn. She said she was "only helping" her husband, as she showed the Commission members her soaked, cracked plans. She said, "I'd like to learn weaving, but only if someone else could take up my other work. At least weaving is less strenuous than this."

Most women do not feel as positive about their traders as Geeta did. Another young woman from her village, Basanti Ghosh, weaves cotton shoulder bags on her small hobby loom and sell them to the Mahajan. She makes Rs. 3/bag, and could weave upto 3-1/2 bags daily, but Mahajan does not give her that much raw material. So she usually earns about Rs. 5. Her landless parents are very old and weak, so she is bound to this weaving work out of economic necessity. She learned it from her aunt. She studied up to the 10th. She has five brothers and one sister. The oldest brother goes to college and works part time in a shop for Rs. 50/month. The other brothers go to school. She is not willing to go to school because she has to look after her ailing mother and their cows.

In Chakkalan village, Punjab, the Commission met 75 women durrie weavers who work at home, completely dependent on their trader. Even their looms belong to him, for which he charges rent. No one dares to take a loan for her own loom because one woman did this, and the trader subsequently stopped giving her work. She had to sell the loom in order to repay the loan. Their durries are sold in Ludhiana, but they could not tell the Commission how they were paid, the calculation is so complicated. They earn around Rs. 10-15 per durrie. They all looked depressed.

In a Bihar meeting in Patna, the Commission heard from Draupadi that the monsoon is a difficult time for the tassar weavers from Saliganj village, because they cannot get either yarn or cocoons. She did not know where her cocoons came from. One woman there told the Commission, "I get Rs. 5/metre for reeling the yarn and weaving the cloth from it. There are 12 metres of running fabric, but the trader deducts one metre as a rule. He says it shrinks when washed. But that is not my fault." Her priority is more and regular work—a common request from women working for traders.

In Perujanaickenpalayam, Coimbatore district, the Commission met women weavers at a meeting. Six of the 16 weavers were cooperative members, but they complained that the cooperative gave them overly complicated designs. When they failed to produce them well, their wages were cut. They like to weave simple borders. Their looms were on rent (Rs. 30-80/month). They get the benefit of a government scheme which gives them one electric bulb at the rate of Rs. 1/month. One woman commented about this, saying "It helps men—they work more than us."

A Commission member asked, "Why?"

"There is only one loom."

They are ready to weave if they can get a separate loom. But many said they could not afford to join the cooperative. The average income is Rs. 300/month, and cooperative shares are Rs. 251/- Also, because of irregular cooperative payment, women often have to work for both the cooperative and the trader.

Sixty out of 360 members are women (17%), but none go to attend the annual General Body meeting. "Are there any women on the cooperatives' managing committee?" one Commission member asked.

"No! But if we were, men would not be able to misuse the money. Women would talk out side the Society and the men's secrets would be out!" one woman answered. All the women laughed.

This led into a discussion of cooperative/trader pros and cons. The society pays higher, but the delay is enormous (three months). The private trader gives lower wages, but very regularly.

"We have to wait till the payment is received from the State Handloom Corporation, and then all our transactions have to be by cheque," the society Secretary said. "And we do give loans, but members



resent repaying them because we are associated with the government. When they take loans with private traders, they repay regularly."

But the women still did not agree that they could get loans easily at the cooperative. They argued, "The cooperative should give loans, because their payments are so late. They have to understand our difficulties. And even though we have to pay the trader higher interest rates, we always get the loan. In the cooperative, we have to bribe so many of the officials, yet we still are not sure if we will get the loan. They are never timely loans!"

At Pochampalli, A.P., the Commission saw the famous tie and dye varieties of saris being woven. Thirty-five villages and 10,000 families are producing these saris which used to be made only for home consumption. Out of 750 cooperative members, only 20 were women. Their jobs are processing, bleaching, tying, dyeing, warping the yarn, and sitting at the looms as men's helpers. At Hyderabad there is an excellent weavers' training centre, "but women do not come for training. It is open to both, but they do not come," said the cooperative secretary.

"What about the general body meeting?" the Commission asked.

"Oh, they do not take interest. But we do not stop them," he answered.

"And loans?"

He answered that 350 members have taken loans, but never given to any woman member.

This cooperative was not offering one shred of active encouragement to help women benefit from their services.

Despite these kinds of difficulties, there is a lot of scope for positive action in the cooperatives. One example of this was encountered in the Dholaka block in Gujarat. There the Commission met Baluben, a traditional Harijan weaver of woollen blankets made from local sheep's wool, and sold locally to the shepherds. She had joined an agriculture workers union, but was not getting much benefit. So the union arranged for these weavers to upgrade their skills at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. With these better skills, they formed a women's cooperative, of which Baluben is the Chairperson. She herself earns about Rs. 600/month now, because she is a good weaver and designer.

But she is not happy, because only 10 of their 60 members have regular work. They mainly weave for the State Handloom Corporation, which supplies wool mixed with marino. They mainly weave shawls from this. The raw material supply is irregular, but their payments are fair and regular. They also produce shawls on their own, but they lack working capital and cannot afford to stock the things till winter.

Through this cooperative Ramila, a Bhangi girl, got a loan to buy herself a loom. She also got training there to upgrade her skill. But she still has two problems which are more difficult for the cooperative to help her solve: There is a lack of space in her house for the loom; and her father has appropriated her loom and asks her to use his pitloom. She cannot produce the shawls of required quality on that loom. Lack of space is a problem for 22 of the 25 women who have acquired looms on loan. The cooperative is negotiating to get assistance under the scheme for a workshop for Harijans.

"I will never be satisfied until all my members have full work," Baluben told the Commission.

The raw material supply and sufficient workspace for a loom are major production constrictions for weaving women all over the country. Tieups with markets and receiving fair payment are their major distribution difficulties. In some places, women are weaving designs which already command a large market, like the Tangail saris, or Kangri shawls from Kashmir, or the Tassar cloth of Bihar. Other women feel the large rift between their traditional cloth weaving and marketable handlooms.

Assamese women are very competent and skilled weavers. Their traditional shawls and skirts are composed of intricately woven designs. Yet, they have not been successful in marketing these. They do not know consumer preferences, or how to incorporate their traditional designs into marketable items. Weavers' cooperatives have not solved their problems. Usually the women work like this: a customer gives a woman yarn for three towels. She weaves them, giving two to the customer, retaining one for herself, as payment. Because it is difficult to sell their products, the banks are not willing to give them loans. And due to the heavy rains in Assam, it is imperative that they have a dry, covered place for their looms so that their products will not get spoiled.

Many Mahila Samitis offer weaving programmes, but the women said, "Weaving is only good for

our home consumption—it has not succeeded in giving us any income.”

The story was similar in other parts of the North-East. Women in Nagaland said they want design guidance. “We want to make things suitable to modern taste which still use our traditional design work,” said a spokeswoman from a group of women running a textile unit. They suggested training in natural dying, and like women everywhere, demanded, “a reasonable price for yarn and assured market and supply of raw materials”. Now they get Rs. 7/day, plus food and accommodation for making shoulder bags.

In Manipur, the same demands were made. And here the Commission was told that there are 50,000 women in Tangkhul area alone. It takes ten days to weave a beautiful Naga shawl which is sold for Rs. 200. The women receive Rs. 10/day labour wage, if and when the shawl is sold. Women pleaded for looms to be made available for the really poor women. They complained loudly about the corrupt practices in loan sanctioning.

The Commission saw a strange situation in Phutzero, Nagaland. There 10-15 young women work at a weaving centre run by the Rural Development Department. The workshed, looms and raw materials are supplied to them for weaving woollen shawls. The weavers neither get a share in the sale profits, nor a labour wage. Their labour was supposed to be “shram-daan”—a donation to the society that will “later” be used for development work. Perhaps the women considered the training as their remuneration?

In both Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, women complained about the recent TRYSEM thrust on weaving training, but with no concurrent access to raw materials or markets. Thus it was basically useless training. Women who received training in Renuka, H.P. for carpet weaving three years ago still have no work.

In Kashmir the Commission met 3-10 young women weaving shawls at a centre affiliated with the State Handloom Corporation, though it is owned privately. They weave the intricate Kangri shawls from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. daily, and receive Rs. 400-500/month. The shawls they produce sell for up to Rs. 1000 each. None of the weavers had ever gone to school, because they had always needed the income from their work.

The Commission received mixed reports on women weavers who were organized into cooperatives or societies. In Calcutta, at the Voluntary Agencies meeting, one organizer said he had been trying to register a cooperative for three years, to no avail. The condition for registration is that each member owns a loom. “But that is the purpose of bringing them together in a cooperative,” he said, “to enable them to acquire assets, like looms.” Their morcha and one hunger strike have not had any affect.

A tribal woman, Kesarbai, was managing a two-year-old weaving centre in Kanba village, Dungarpur district, Rajasthan. She learned to read and write in the local centre run by a social organization. Then she learned weaving. Now she and 15 other women earn about Rs. 380/month, weaving cloth at a rate of Rs. 4/metre. They have started a savings fund of Rs. 2500 from which they give revolving loans. Kesarbai expressed the opinion heard over and over again when she said, “We prefer working in a common shed to working at home, because we can be more productive, and help each other too.”

In Punjab, carpet weavers working in a private centre in Raja Sansi, district Amritsar, thought their organisational problems would be solved if they could form cooperatives under the government. Then they thought they would receive fair wages. Now they get Rs. 7/day from the trader who owns the centre. He also owns all the looms they use, which cost about Rs. 1000 each. Kuljeet weaves borders on carpets here for Rs. 5-7/day, but the work is not available regularly. Her husband is ill and this wage is the only income on which the family survives.

Preetam is a widow, and because her three sons are earning, she cannot get a pension, despite the fact they are not helping her. These women all wanted regular work and fair wages, “We must earn Rs. 400-500/month.”

In another Punjab Village, Bungal, in Gurdaspur District the Commission Visited DWACRA Projects. Two groups are doing pashmina carding, spinning and weaving in separate villages. A shop of their products is owned by a man selling other shawls. He has given them help on their designs and said he does not mark the shawls up at all from the weavers’ price. This shop has helped these DWACRA women

have a market.

They earn about Rs. 17/shawl. Some earn Rs. 400-500/month but for all the members to earn that much they need capital. The bank might grant a loan, but as they do not have an assured market, they refuse to borrow.

In Kanchipuram, T.N., there is a women weavers' cooperative society, but its governing board was recently taken over by the government. The women were not sure why. They must have gone too deeply in debt. Only two of the members were weaving on their own. The rest employed other women for weaving at a salary of Rs. 100/month. They said they prefer children even more, because they learn faster. They said they had formed their own society "because in most cooperatives, they will not take women as members."

The low wages women weavers are receiving all over the country are high by the standards of what the spinners or women who do the preweaving preparation are receiving. There are 100 pashmina spinners at Ganderbad in Kashmir. Most of them earn Rs. 60-90/month for spinning the most costly yarn India produces. Azra is now an old woman, and she has been doing this work since she was four. One widow, Sarva, said she buys local pashmina from a local trader at the rate of Rs. 30 for 30 grams. After spinning, she sells it back to him for Rs. 60. It is one week's work of spinning 10 hours a day. She does this all year round. None of the 100 women thought they could form a cooperative because they are illiterate, and none were aware of the market price the middleman was getting for this.

In the Gurdaspur DWACRA project, women earn Rs. 100-150/month for sorting the wool. These women are not agricultural labourers, and do not have any other sources of income. "Only those who have their own land work on the land here," one woman explained.

Some women in Bihar who are receiving Rs. 5/metre for weaving tassar cloth begin with raw cocoons. This wage includes boiling, feeling or spinning, and the weaving. Those who only do the processing and reeling work receive Rs. 1.50-Rs. 4/day. There are 3000 women doing this work in Varsaliganj village. The trader had been paying them Rs. 1.50/day for spinning, until they organized into a union. After staging a "Sammelan" and putting forth their demands, he relented and gave them a 15 paise raise in wage. Needless to say, the women still do not think it is enough.

In Bhagalpur, Bihar, 90% of the tassar reelers are Muslim women in disadvantaged positions, at the mercy of the traders conditions for work. They have organized into a union which is arranging training to upgrade their skills so that they can produce specific kinds of high quality yarns—Katia, Royal, Kukru, and Matka. Their aim is to eliminate middlemen, and their demands were these:

- (1) Fixing of minimum wages for spinners and reelers by the Labour Department.
- (2) Each woman should own a Charkha.

The organization has so far provided big charkhas to 25 women and small ones to 45 women, from a revolving fund. The women pay back Rs. 20-25/ month.

Without charkhas, women have to do the reeling work on their bare inner thigh, just above the knee. The Commission observed the painful results of this in Kosa centre, Madhya Pradesh, where women had open sores from the reeling. They told the Commission members they could only continue to work until the sores got too painful. Then they would wait until they had healed again, somewhat, before resuming work.

In Tamilnadu's Kanchipuram district women do all the critical preparation for the actual weaving process. If working as an employee, men weavers get Rs. 10/day and women get Rs. 2—this includes, reeling, warping, sizing dyeing, and fixing the beam. If a lot of zari work is involved, men get Rs. 20, but women *still* get Rs. 2, despite the fact that they help set the design and also sit at the loom with the weaver.

The women here wanted to be members of the society, though only their men now belong. They had their hopes set on the bonus and dividends each member receives as a result of their work.

In Coimbatore district, village Kuruchi, 30 women are spinning on Ambar charkhas. They make 40 paise per hank of yarn. They can produce 20 hanks daily, or about Rs. 8. They complained of headaches from the constant clacking of the charkhas. They get a yearly bonus of Rs. 150. And "Once a year we have a General meeting, with lunch, and big people come from Madras and give us advice." One women spinner proudly told the Commission.

"What advice?"

Silence.

Then all the spinners exchanged glances.

Then giggling.

"We do not remember."

## Handicrafts

Kondereddi Laxmi is one of 60,000 lacemakers in and around Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh. She is one of a large community of Kshatriyas, whose women do not go out to work. She begins her day each morning at 4 a.m., does housework. By 6 a.m. she begins the lacemaking. At 1 p.m. she rests for one hour. From 2 p.m.-10 p.m. she continues her industrious looping, pulling, crocheting of simple thread into delicate lace. By doing this for 12-15 hrs. each day, she can complete one reel in four days. She earns Rs. 6-8 for these four days of work. Because her husband divorced her eight years ago, she has to support herself and five children on this income. She herself studied up to the 8th standard, now her three girls and two boys are all studying and helping with the housework. Although she did not say so, some of them must be earning small wages or begging outside. Otherwise, how could all six of them be surviving on less than Rs. 2/day?

She used to work on a piece-rate basis for the contractor but her earnings were even lower. Now she purchases the reel for Rs. 15/-, makes the lace, and sells it to the trader, usually for Rs. 23/-. This piece bought at Rs. 23 is exported at Rs. 150, without any additional labour performed on it, except packaging. Eighty to ninety per cent of this lace is exported.

Many other women from her village are earning only Rs. 1/day, because it takes them seven days to complete a reel. They can only find eight hours a day to work on it, instead of 15, like Kondereddi Laxmi finds.

Her case illustrates the central issues of home-based workers all over the country. They are both literally and officially invisible. They work in their home, so no one sees their labour. And they are not protected by any kind of labour legislation, so they receive abysmally low wages and no benefits. They do not even have the privilege of assured work even at this miserably low wage.

There are two types of home-based workers—artisans, and piece-rate workers. They almost universally sound the cry of "there is not enough work!" This can be interpreted several ways. For artisans it means they suffer access to raw materials. Many woodcarvers, toy makers, and bamboo and reed workers, are suffering a loss of raw materials due to deforestation, or laws prohibiting the harvest of these products. Even if they can acquire the raw materials, the cost prohibits their purchase, or makes the finished products too costly to command a very large market. For dona patta leaf plate makers, it is because the raw material is only seasonally available. For weavers and potters who lack space, it means their work must halt during monsoons. For anyone involved in a decorative craft, their market is just by nature limited they produce non-necessity items. They are also badly affected by mechanization. Potters and coir workers are threatened by plastics. Changes in social custom are making traditional skills defunct. Tribals are no longer wearing only block prints or habitually carrying their printed roomals. Tie and die is no longer purchased by all middle class Rajasthanis. Custom no longer dictates purchasing a certain kind of sari for wearing during mourning, or at marriages. Certain woodcarvings only sell in festival seasons. And the real crux of the problem lies in the sheer numbers of workers. Contractors only give sporadic work because the market is limited. And so many women want this work that they will accept a pittance—however erratically it is paid.

In an Ahmedabad meeting, the Commission heard evidence of the problems from many craftswomen. Nurjahan blockprints one bedsheet a day for a trader. She can do more than that, but there is no market. She used to help her mother print sheets, handkerchiefs, dhoties and saris of different types, but because of screenprint, she no longer gets this work. "I can print two chadars a day with my blocks," she told the Commission, "but with a screen, people can print at least 24 a day." Also, women like her used to print all the Adivasis clothing. Now these men wear pants. She has to settle for only Rs. 2/day for her one sheet.

Sairabanu, the Vice President of the women's cooperative there, lamented this lack of market. "We

specialize in vegetable dyes," she explained. "And after learning better production techniques, account keeping, store managing and sales, we have become more self confident—but we are not economically better off."

Another woman at this meeting, Saraswati of the Bansfodia (meaning bamboo chippers) community mentioned about the non-availability of bamboo for her broom and basket making. "These days we have to buy our bamboo from the retailer at Rs. 12-15 per bamboo! He buys it at Rs. 3.50 directly from the forest. And the paper mills of Maharashtra, we hear, buy our bamboo at 26 paise each!" She said besides raw material, they really need space to work. Now they have to work on the footpath or on the road near their house. Then the neighbours lodge complaints and the police fine them. But they have no space in the house to keep the bamboo.

Their women's cooperative is lacking in management skills, but nonetheless they got a contract to supply brooms and baskets to the government establishments because of a state resolution to give preference to women's cooperatives to supply certain items. One member said, "If it was not for this resolution, the plastic industry would have all our business!"

Craftspeople who rely on forest produce for raw materials are almost unanimously suffering losses. Udaipur bamboo workers prefer to buy from Bhils (tribals) who bring it from the forest illegally, because it is cheaper. While the Forest Corporation sells for Rs. 4-5 each, Bhils take Rs. 1.25-1.50 (And the Bhils are selling illegally because they get a better price from the Craftswomen than from the Forest Corporation). From 16 bamboos, they produce five baskets (one day's work), with a profit of Rs. 2/basket. They sell in the local market, but space is limited and police harassment is unrelenting. Because of this, they often walk to outlying villages and peddle their baskets there. Their priorities were a place in the market, and working capital.

Toymakers in Udaipur are up against two more serious disadvantages. The Kher wood which these 70 families use for covering their toys is rapidly becoming extinct due to deforestation. There is no new cultivation of Kher, and only in Madhya Pradesh are there still productive stands. Some of these women have had to turn to employment as domestic servants.

Seventy-five families in this area are involved in making leaf plates and bowls. Their business thrives during wedding season and hibernates during monsoon. They, like bamboo workers, buy direct from Bhils. They are unusual crafts people in that no middlemen are involved in their production. The customer comes to them to place orders, and they buy their raw materials directly from the collectors. Their problems lie in the lack of storage space for the leaves, in deforestation, causing decline of the crop, and in the seasonal nature of the market.

They pay Rs. 10-20 for one bunch of leaves depending on the season. From this amount they can market 500 leaf plates (pattal), which they can sell for Rs. 15, and 1000 bowls (dona) for which they take Rs. 20. They say their only alternative to this traditional work is manual labour at Rs. 4-5/day.

People doing this same work in Bilaspur, H.P., are the villagers who were displaced by the Kangra dam. The five bighas of land they were given here is infertile, so dona pattal provides their sole income. Women can make 500-600 plates a day, for which they earn Rs. 30 (gross). But this is a seasonal income. They want loans or subsidy so they can buy a whole year's supply of leaves in season and store them. In this way, they would not lack employment in any season.

Tamilnadu basket weavers in a Madras meeting said they have to bring their raw materials from Andhra Pradesh. They are originally S/T migrants from there. Once a year they go to Kandappa with their entire family and spend three months collecting reeds called 'ichemu'. For one truck load they pay Rs. 6000/- for transport charges. A hundred families bring four to five loads, meaning each family has to have a working capital of at least Rs. 300/- plus its living expenses while the members are not earning.

They return to Tamilnadu, make baskets and, sell street to street the children, adults, everyone collecting, producing, hawking. Their problem is storage of these truckloads of reeds. Police and the Municipal Corporation harass them for encroachment of the road. Their main demands were a workshop and loans.

Kerala reed workers are now forced to buy raw materials they used to harvest themselves. They pay Rs. 28/bunch, which lasts 3-4 days and nets about Rs. 35. They complained to the Commission that 75% of this reed goes to rayon factories and paper mills. The Forest Corporation will supply them with

reed, but then they must sell their products there and their price is very low. They suggested that the Forest Corporation should use the profits they obviously make from their work, on welfare programmes for the reed workers.

Six Maharashtrian women from Jamkhed got a loan of Rs. 500/- through their local social organisation. They used it to buy the raw materials for their broom making at a lower bulk price. Now they make and sell their brooms for Rs. 1/each, both in the village market and to a cyclewallah who sells them in town. They have repaid their loan and said, "We are okay now, with this income."

Other women artisans who have troubles in acquiring their raw materials are carpenters, tinsmiths, junksmiths, and 'lifafa' (paper bag) makers. Many women involved in these occupations recycle old materials to produce their new ones. These used to be free for the collecting. Now they tell different stories.

Saraswati, from Pansodia, W.B., is a blacksmith. She and her husband travel between all the surrounding villages and marketplaces to do work wherever they can find it. She wants iron scrap at a reasonable rate—this is their biggest constriction. Her husband makes Rs. 12/day while she earns Rs. 5. When there is not so much work available, she leaves him to smith for a higher wage, and she does agricultural labour.

Mira Tulsiram learned her carpentry skills from her family. Her mother was a tinsmith who married into a carpenter's family. They were originally from Marwar migrated to Gujarat five decades back. She acquired her skills from both her mother and husband, and has taught her daughters in turn. They make small furniture out of scrap wood like fruit boxes. They collect from wholesale merchants in fruit markets, from chemists, and buy it retail from waste merchants. They make small things like stools, racks, small table and kitchen equipment. As a routine they buy their raw materials on Tuesday, make the furniture from Wednesday to Friday; on Saturday they paint, polish and varnish. On Sunday they sell at Sunday Markets to poor and lower middle class families. On Mondays they do their housework and socialize before they begin again on Tuesday. The average family income from this is Rs. 300-500 p.m.

Some women involved in this work sell directly to shopkeepers. Others sell from village to village themselves. All of them said they need access to all their raw materials at wholesale or junk prices.

In this some Ahmedabad workers meeting, some junksmiths told about their work. They were strong women with muscular hand and large biceps, dressed colourfully. They do "thanda-garam"—cold and hot—work. 'Thanda' work is tinsmithing. From scrap iron, sheets and pipes, they make baskets, buckets, barrels, racks and cooking utensils. The majority of women do this. The 'garam' work of women is making chains of all sizes.

For both 'thanda' and 'garam' smiths, their major problem is raw materials. They currently have to buy from retailers, which is costly, because they sell their goods in poor peoples' markets. There is low purchasing power in these markets, hence a very low profit margin for themselves. But sales are not a problem. They can sell everything they make. They want this raw materials directly from their scrap source mills, big industrial plants, factories or godowns.

One Commission member asked, "Would you prefer new material to scrap?"

They thought a while and said, "No, we would prefer junk." Their average income from this work is Rs. 250/month, and several of them complained about their very temporary housing, from which they are often ousted.

A Bihari woman from Bhagalpur was at the Commission's Patna meeting, and she described the difficulties of getting the 'raddi' for her 'Lifafa' (paper bag) making. "Now-a-days people sell raddi!" Fatima said. "Even the crumpled pieces and small scraps from waste papers baskets. It used to be free!" She has sold her bags to grocers for many years to make her living. For the last five years this has become increasingly difficult, because she has to pay too much for the scrap paper. She sends her son to offices to collect raddi. "Sometimes he is successful, sometimes not."

Textile artisans face slightly different problems. Their access to raw materials is often absolutely controlled by many middlemen, and their work is practically reduced to piece rate as a result.

The Chikan workers in Lucknow, U.P., are a special example of how organizing has helped end exploitation they have suffered for decades.

The Commission visited the production centre run by a women's organisation for six years. Fifty

women were involved in production and ten were under training. They concentrate on perfection of highly skilled embroidery which they work into kurtas, saris and dupattas. They sell to elite markets in urban areas. Their production is systematic.

All the women workers were from the Muslim community. Hasina told the Commission she had been doing this particular work for 40 years. "Before this centre, I got Rs. 5/- for this work. Now I get Rs. 20/-. I have been to some of our exhibitions in big fancy cities, and now I realize the worth of our work."

Umarbaji said that women outside get 80 paise for embroidering one kurta, which is one day's work. "Their payments are full of cuts that we no longer face here."

Saira was a young girl, who has disabled legs. She told the Commission, "Before I came here, I was severely ill and depressed. I knew only one stitch. I joined training here, and now, I get to give training to other young girls!" The organizers helped her get a bicycle. She said her mother wears a burkha, but "I never will!"

It was apparent that the earnings had increased for all the members. The Secretary explained, though, how middlemen were spreading work out to villages, "at throwaway rates." She pressed for land and greater government assistance in welfare programmes for her members.

Iraj Fatrana comes from her village over to the Lucknow centre to work. She is the only earning member of her family. She is organizing women to give up wearing the burkha. She described the operational chain of middlemen to the Commission.

"The Mahajan will give 500 saris for embroidery to a man who will go on a cycle to different villages. He will give 50-100 saris to each of 10 or 12 houses. These men and women will distribute the saris in their own village. Each will have their cuts, you see! If there is a little stain on the sari the Mahajan will cut our wages. We try to reject stained cloths from the contractor, but they pressure us. Then we accept it, knowing we will get little or no income, just to prevent the 'worth of the contractor', lest he stops giving us work totally."

Even women who do not work at the centre have found that traders prefer trained women. At the centre each woman learns all the stitches so that she can complete all the embroidery on one kurta without it changing hands. Thus she earns more and the contractor avoids stains, low quality, and the trouble of changing hands.

The chikan workers society's sales are good and they have an honest but uneconomical administration. They want to extend their services to more women, but they lack the necessary capital. They want soft loans to bolster their working capital and they want reservation of LDA housing scheme for chikan workers. "We suffer TB and we lose our eyesight because of the crowded housing and dark quarters in Muslim areas," Baji said.

In a women's meeting in Rajkot, Gujarat, the Commission met embroiderers and bead workers who had not had the fortune of finding an elite market for their goods.

Sakina was the biggest entrepreneur of the bead workers present. She makes things like fancy tray covers, purses, dolls, photoframes and portraits. She refused to sell to the trader because she fears he will steal her designs and then commission them to other bead workers at lower rates. Thus she likes to sell directly to the customers, but her things pile up. She does not have enough direct contracts. She has come out of purdah for the sake of creating her own direct market.

A quiltmaker at this same meeting told about her work. It takes her two days to make a quilt, which she usually does at home unless the customers specifically request her to make them at their houses. She gets some advance for buying the cotton, the cloth and quiltcover from a fixed shop. She charges Rs. 45 per quilt, earning about Rs. 300/month. Her husband does not work and her son is "out of line". Her daughter looks after the housework. She first stepped out of the house against her husband's will, but now he is cooperative. The constant work with cotton irritates her throat. She suffers from asthma in the winter.

Jijiben does traditional embroidery and patchwork which she learned from her mother, and then changed and developed her own as time passed. She said that the shopkeeper who she does work for likes her designs, but does not pay enough. "I want my own shop," she told the Commission. "I could train other girls. The public likes my designs, so I know there is a good market. Then we could all get regular, good work."



"What is your priority?" one Commission member asked.

"A national award for me," she answered sheepishly.

The tie and dye workers in Jodhpur were suffering some of the most exploitative conditions the Commission saw. There is a mohalla of 400-500 home-based Muslim women doing this work in one part of the city. They told the Commission they were 2000 such workers in the city.

Usually all the family members work to produce one piece—a sari or dupatta. Men prepare the dyes. They do the work in three stages: they draw small squares into the desired pattern on the cloth and fill them in with various colours of dyes, wind threads tightly over these coloured spots, and then they dye the remainder of the cloth. The tying and dying can happen several times on the piece of cloth for different colours to be added to the pattern.

One group of women said they got paid for each operation e.g. 25 paise for filling colour. This way they earned Rs. 1-4/day. A later, the group said they are paid piece rate. A trader gives them material for 100 saris. The rate is Rs. 1/sari or Re. 1 for 3 dupattas. Out of 100, seven or eight are always rejected. Five women in one family worked on all the processes. It took them one month to finish 100 saris. Thus the monthly income of five women came to Rs. 94/ or about Rs. 16 per woman. From this they have to buy the dyes and thread for the next job, as well as using their own vessels for dye.

These women had these priorities: better wages, working capital so they could buy their own cloth, space for working.

The Commission also met leather and clothing aritari workers in Jodhpur. In one house women were embroidering gold threads into skirts and 'odhnis' used for weddings—traditionally in Rajasthan, but now in other parts of the country as well. They pull the cloth tight over a cot and 6-8 were sitting around it doing the embroidery work. The lighting and ventilation were very poor. A woman named Pushpa gave the girls the work for Rs. 1.50/day. She lamented how little she made, but said "out of 'pity' for these poor girls I gave them work". She gets the material from a middleman and he sells them to shopkeepers or other traders.

Another group of 40 women doing this work on their own said they can each earn Rs. 10/day if two girls help them. Their major problems were the harassment by middlemen and the irregularity of work. They all wanted loans.

In a meeting of 50 women doing aritari (brocade) work on footwear called mojri in the neighbourhood of Jodhpur, they said 1000 women do this work in Jodhpur. Twenty-six of them did the work for their own family business, 24 worked for others. The material is supplied by shoemakers, and they earn Rs. 3 for embroidering one pair, which takes one day. Most of them work from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. They said the regular mojri market has declined in recent years, but there is still a demand for higher quality ones.

This meeting was interrupted by some young men who wanted commitments from the Commission for loans but things eventually settled down again.

In Surat city, the Commission met women doing golden (artificial) zari work on powerloom in a house where two family members and three relatives were employed. This is the gola community's traditional work. They work from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. and earn about Rs. 300/- on a piece rate basis. Their work is sent to Benaras. It is a thriving business of Surat, engaging not less than 5000 families.

More lace makers were met in Bihar. Rehana from Bhagalpur said five women work on one bedcover, which they finish in one day, paid Rs. 5/- for it. If any stain is found, Rs. 3/- are deducted. They have never thought of buying the raw materials in bulk, and selling themselves. "We are not advanced as you think we are!" they told the Commission when asked about this idea. What they think need is a clean workplace so they will not lose their wages to stains. "But we cannot dream of any such space in our crowded mohallas! and we cannot go outside to work....."

In Srinagar, the Commission met a large number of girls doing the crafts of embroidery, carpet, weaving, papermache, tailoring and weaving, connected to the Markaz-i-Behbooti Khwatees Miskee Bagh Centre. They give preference to orphans and destitute women. Training and employment programmes were linked with health and education programmes. There are hostel and training facilities for girls of Gujjar and Bakarwal communities (nomadic tribes). They try to give the girls confidence and skills to stand on their own feet.



The women who came to meet the Commission in Himachal Pradesh did not have such positive success stories with their crafts. Candlemakers in Simla earned only Rs. 2-3/day on good days, because their market was so limited. A Hosiery Cooperative was practically defunct because they had no work. Some women had taken a year long embroidery course and received machines, but had no orders. Under TRYSEM, others got training and loans for knitting machines, but they are still waiting for a promised order from the police for their first job. Another woman got doll-making training, but has no market and no supply of raw materials. Many others had been trained in carpet weaving, sewing, and tailoring, but none had work. One official present at the meeting used all these examples to make her point, "Extension work is critical in these projects!" They had tried to market the goods in village fairs, but with no success.

In Punjab, at the Tejpur meeting with Mahila Mandal the Commission visited their leather and tailoring centre. The President complained that raw materials were very expensive, and they did not have sufficient marketing links. The Commission members saw that the quality and designs of their products were high, and the prices very reasonable. The Secretary thought part of their problem was that they were on a kuchha road, so they did not get much traffic and it hampered their market. They wanted a building.

They talked about how much support and guidance they had received by the Research Organization of Delhi. They were a strong, well-motivated group who would fare well with a little marketing support.

The Bhileswar Mahila Samiti in Rajasthan is made up of sweepers and cleaners. They wanted to change their low status so they took up a training programme and learned stitching and leather work. Then they began producing rexine bags, because leather was too expensive. They have not been able to sell any of their products. They have two years of production picked up. "We feel ridiculous!" they told the Commission. "Everyone laughs at us and says, see you were destined to be sweepers!"

Slum women in various parts of the country have been obliged by economic pressure to be very creative. In the Hyderabad slums, women were making plaster of paris statues with their children's help. Marketing is not a problem, but the demand is seasonal. Customers give orders at their name. They earn about Rs. 300/month during festival seasons. The downtown market was filled with numerous Ganesha statues made by them.

Jamuna, another women from the slum in Bombay, makes surgical thread from goats' intestines, but she does not know about the rate for it because her husband sells it. Her neighbour, Nirmaladevi, who migrated from Alamgarh, six years ago was forced to start cutting supari (betelnut) when her husband lost his work in the Bombay textile strike. She is supplied the suparis by a private trader. She cuts 6-7 kg. from 10 a.m to 6 p.m. every day for Rs. 5/- She said it is dangerous because of her small children in the house running around the cutting block. She often has nightmares about what could happen.

In the Bangalore slums many women roll agarbatti. Mehbooba rolls 2000-3000 sticks a day. A woman from the factory delivers the powder and sticks to her and collects the finished agarbattis. The factory is in the slum. She makes Rs. 1.25—1.50 per 1000. Every year they get a 10 paise raise in wages. As in bidi, 200-400 per 1000 are rejected which amounts to 25-30 paise. The legal minimum wage is Rs. 11/1000, but no one is aware of it. Sixty women in this slum do this work. Usually Mehbooba earns Rs. 12/week.

The woman said from the 'puli patti' is 'cold' so nothing happens, but the 'kali patti' is 'hot' so has a harmful effect on their skin.

Hasina, the mother of 13 children also does this work. She was one of many women who said they prefer to work at home, not outside.

Another woman in the Bangalore slum, Clara, was making toy sun glasses at home and selling them to a shopkeeper. She buys the raw materials locally for Rs. 10/-. She makes a gross and sells them to the shopkeeper for Rs. 15/-. She says there is a good demand and the shopkeeper is willing to buy more, but for this she needs capital. "How much capital?" the Commission asked. "With Rs. 25-30, I could double my income," she replied. She supports one son and two daughters on this income, and though she never went to school, she can read and write. She never goes to a doctor. And while she goes to church, she expects nothing from them.

Another woman Kundamma canes chairs at her slum dwelling. Both she and her husband weave plastic cane into iron chairs. They earn Rs. 20-25/ day, if they get work. Their house is in the middle of the slum, and "who walk all the way to this dirty place when they can get the same service on the main road?" She learned this craft from her father, and taught her husband in turn.

Another woman, Ramanikamma, a slum dweller in Madras, does pottery in her tiny space. Her husband used to sit at the wheel, but since his illness, she had had to hire a boy to that job. She does all the other work—mixing and recycling, drying, and shopping the pots, fixing the kiln, purchasing raw materials of clay and wood. She earns about Rs. 300/- month, but not during the monsoon. She is in constant fear of eviction. She wants a loan to build on the 10'×13' land allotment that she received—she does not have sufficient space here.

In the Kohlapur slum in Maharashtra there are many chamar lather workers engaged in making chappals. Laxmi Gauri's husband cuts the soles and they both stitch them to the straps, by hand. She also puts gold thread on the straps in a decorative design. She earned Rs. 3/day, while he earned Rs. 20/- for the same number of hours.

Another handicraft occupation the Commission met many women working in was coir. In Madras, Mangamma was making rope from coir. She borrows Rs. 50/- to buy her raw materials, and pays 6% interest per day on it. Besides credit, her problem is workplace. She would like to work in a community workshop if it is not too distant. She is in constant fear of eviction after being evicted from five places in her life.

In Kerala, women who are members of the coir co-op get higher rates than non-organized women, but the work is not regular. They face stiff competition from plastics, and with mechanization. Seventy-five per cent of the four lakh coir workers in Kerala are women. There is a threat from the neighbouring state of Tamilnadu where new husking machines are being adopted, and only men are being employed on those machines. The minimum wage is officially 11.80 for this work, but they cut it down to piece work and women earn only Rs. 6-8.

Their work involves soaking the coconut shell and rotting the green husk, so they can extract the fibres inside. They beat these to prepare the fibres for spinning, which they do both by machine and by hand. Gomti has done this work since she was 12. Now she is 46. She studied up to the 4th Standard. Her father is a landless mason. She had been deserted by her husband eight years before. Her married son lives separately from her. Her daughter, who was also deserted by her husband, lives and works with Gomti.

She earns Rs. 10-15/day for husking and spinning 100 coconuts. She works 7 a.m.-6 p.m. The owner of the land hires her directly. He gives her advances when she needs them with no interest. She attends her union's meeting once a year and gets a bonus through them. Due to her hands being perpetually submerged in water, her palms had deep cracks. Her priority was an old pension equivalent to her present income.

The only kite maker the Commission met was in Ahmedabad. Rasulanbanu makes a kind of kite called 'ghesia' for a factory, eight months a year. She gets Rs. 30 for 500 kites. It takes her two days to make this many, with the help of her neighbour (whom she pays Rs. 2/-) and her two daughters:

She also produces kites on her own. She buys the paper from the local merchant, and came from Calcutta. She knows the entire process for producing kites. She said she needs working capital and a bigger workspace without so many children running around.

The most beautiful setting in which the Commission encountered artisans was in rural Orissa—the state with the most traditional crafts. Their silk and cotton ikat weaving, silver filigree stone and woodcarving, toy making, applique work and painting are famous.

The Commission members travelled to the village of Raghurajpur, Puri District by road. They passed a stone carving of a gotapuri dancer representing the famous Orissi dance which originated here. In the centre of the village it was busy but quiet. The houses all had high raised platforms on their front sides, roofed by the first floor, so the crafts people had shaded, open air porches where they sat to work. The men and women were traditionally dressed in handloom ikat dhotis or their simply wrapped saris which need no blouse. There were 46 households in this village. The households towards the back were where the broom and basket makers lived and worked. Beyond them stretched lush green paddy fields.

In the centre, most people were engaged in this village's craft speciality—images of Lord Jagannath. Some worked on 'pattachitra', handmade paper on which they paint the trio of gods. Others make papermache masks and carved wooden images of these same three. They use bright orange, red, yellow, white, and black colours. One woman making the small wooden trio of gods said she would earn Rs. 4 on the entire set. Another was working on a set of masks. They take one day to complete, and she makes a profit of Rs. 5/ when she sells them for Rs. 14/.

They sell their things to the Handicrafts Board through the cooperative but only 10 of the women were members, so mostly their husbands sold their products. Most women said they can not afford to buy the raw materials and that the cooperative offered no help with this.

Other women were making the brightly painted wooden toy animals that Orissa is famous for. The week previous to the Commission's visit Sunamani sold a large Jagannath trio set for Rs. 200/-.

However, these kind of sales are rare. Most families said "Our entire family works at this, and still the income is insufficient for necessities."

Leena was sitting on her porch painting Lord Jagannath in many sizes. She and her three sisters learned to do this from their father. Her husband was a famous artist who deserted her. Now she lives in her daughter's house. She works at painting from 9.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. She does all the housework as well. She purchases the raw materials, makes the paper herself, and the colours. She said she needs a soft loan. And she said that her biggest problem was "too much work". Her monthly income is Rs. 100-120. Her sales are good during festivals, and she was a good artist. One Commission member requested her, "What are your difficulties, tell us?" She started to speak, but her lips quivered. Someone else said "She has no sons, so at this age she has to live alone and do all this work."

No one mentioned the husband and his act of desertion.

## Garments

In West Bengal, at Midnapur and Howra Haat, traders give material to women for stitching on piece rate. They distribute this kind of work to villages all around Calcutta. For stitching 12 petticoats, they pay Rs. 8/-. Gita can sew 20 a day in 11 hours if her two daughters help her. Thus she earns Rs. 300/- a month—before she deducts her costs for thread, lace, and maintenance of her sewing machine.

Shantila does the same work in a factory. Ten women are employed for stitching, and one man for cutting. She makes Rs. 300-350 per month. She prefers to work in the factory, where she can use their equipment; they also supply all the raw materials.

In Bangalore, Gulabjan's trader pays her only Rs. 1.25 per petticoat. She stitches them on a second-hand sewing machine which she bought for Rs. 500/-. She earns between Rs. 7-15/day, depending on how many interruptions she encounters from her four young children. The contractor pays her son. Her husband is an unemployed poster painter. She also has to pay for her thread, needles and lace.

Champaben from Rajkot is a little better off than she might be because she knows how to do the cutting work herself; otherwise she would be completely at the mercy of the contractors. She can do this work independently as well as for a contractor who gives her regular low paid work. She stitches petticoats and children's garments for a shopkeeper. Due to the drought, she is not getting much work on her own. She is more dependent now on the low rate of the contractor. He pays Rs. 5/- for a dozen petticoats (41 paise each)! She told the Commission that blouses bring her the best income. "If I stitch it on my own, I earn Rs. 7/-. For a trader I earn Rs. 3/-. For a contractor, Rs. 1.50."

During the marriage, Holi and Diwali seasons, she can earn Rs. 250/ month. Otherwise she earns only 200/month. "Our competitors are the men-tailors. They have a better reputation of work and their own shops." She liked the idea of having her own shop. "It should be in the market place. Then I could make a good living."

In Ahmedabad the rates are a little better than Rajkot because the women had formed a union and demanded higher payment. Mushtakinbibi and her three daughters stitch six dozen petticoats a day. They get Rs. 8/- per dozen, so they usually earn Rs. 48/day. "When we got unionized, the contractors stopped our work and brought new women. Then we staged a morcha. Now we have gone so far as to

demand that tailoring be included in the state schedule of minimum wages. Let us see what happens....." She is on the Executive Committee of her union.

Another kind of stitching activity that many women are involved in is quilt making. In Ahmedabad, Karimaben makes quilt covers from 'chindi'—rags from textile mills. Unemployment looms high in her area of Dariapur, which is quite riot-prone. Thus even men have taken up this work, and the women are afraid it will bring their stitching rates down, "which we have raised only with difficulty through our union". There are 400 women like Karimaben, working for traders, getting Rs. 2/- for one quilt cover. About 200 women have formed a cooperative, and have a shop in the market. There is a good demand for their chindi quilts from both rural and urban poor. They have only one problem: non-availability of rags. They demanded that "All the mill waste should be directly given to us (producers)."

Because of Gujarat's large textile mills, Rajkot also has its chindi workers. Prabhaben stitches these quilts from rags she buys in bulk. Formerly she was paid 40 paise per quilt cover. Then she took a loan from the Women's Bank so she could buy the materials herself. She produces her own quilt covers and sells each for six rupees. Her income has risen from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 500/- per month. Now she helps other women get loans to do the same. But she is frustrated by the closure of mills in Gujarat. Chindi is less easily available and costlier than before. Her husband is a retired bank peon with no pension, and her daughter-in-law "is useless"; she earns the Rs. 500/- through her own labour.

Other women in Ahmedabad recycle gunny sacks instead of textile rags. They make new bags by stitching two old bags together. They are paid Rs. 8/day for stitching 25 bags. Though the trader does give them thread, he does not give regular work. And they constantly breathe in the fine cement dust which also gets into their eyes and causes sores.

In Punjab, there is a garment centre run by PUNWAC in Jullunder City. They teach tailoring, knitting, and embroidery. They stitch uniforms for the police, and canvas bags for the army. They also knit police socks. Jaspal, a woman from Patiala whose husband deserted her, earns Rs. 150/month there stitching canvas bags.

At a similar establishment in Ludhiana, women are making woollen clothes, police uniforms, fancy cardigans, children's clothing and undergarments, on modern machinery. Last year this centre supplied 5000 uniforms to the police. Saranjeet told the Commission she was illiterate and without work. She took training here for 15 days and started working. She makes 6-7 cardigans a week at Rs. 7/cardigan. She earns about Rs. 150/month, the only income for their family. She said she would prefer to work at home if she could get a knitting machine and some working capital.

The Commission visited one other such tailoring and knitting training centre in Jammu at Budayal, Quizan, Poonch district. The Central Social Welfare Board runs it to train scheduled caste girls. They got their sewing machines through an interest free loan at the end of their training.

Throughout the tour the Commission observed what great scope there is for women doing stitching work in these small centres or at home. There is an ever-increasing market for ready-made goods, but the existing disadvantages are: In private centres, women get good training and a subsequent job for their new skills, but their wages are extremely low. In training programmes, women acquire skills and equipment, but rarely practical tie-ups with markets or working capital. Without these, women often end up in the long run, deeper in debt than they started due to having to buy equipment loans and no work.

These training programmes do not adequately teach women cutting, which binds them to piece work for someone who has cutting done for them. As long as women are doing unorganised stitching for contractors, their wages will remain at their present low level.

In the Ahmedabad meeting with voluntary agencies, someone mentioned that the Khadi Board had made a resolution to give all tailoring work to women's organizations, but that it is not being implemented. She said, "The system of middlemen seems inevitable—why?"

Instead of answering why, the government official said, "Now there are so many women's organizations that each one gets little work—less than earlier."

Each stitcher mentioned that she works till almost the last day of the pregnancy.

## The money we earn from our blood

### Food Processing

Jhanjuban is a 60 year old masala grinder in Bhavnagar. In the masala season she spends her days walking the streets of middle class neighbourhood, calling out for work. When someone requests her services, she stops to sit in their courtyard, or even on the street, and pounds spices in her iron vessel. Her customers pay her by the kilo, and some are more fair than others. Some want fine masala, and give her a small sieve for sifting it. Some weigh her work after she is finished, so the loss for seeds and stems and sifting falls on her head. Others weigh before, and thus she makes a slightly better income. She gets between Rs 1-2 per kilo.

Her three sons are all construction workers who live apart from her. If she cannot find work, she borrows money from a neighbour until she earns something, or until her sons can help her pay her debt. She has done this work since she was six years old. She learned it from her neighbours.

When she cannot get work in houses, she works in masala shops. She prefers this because she does not have to walk so much on her aching feet. Some shopkeepers are kind and weigh her work after it is finished, so added salt and oil work to her advantage. Some let her take the chilli seeds home. Others instruct her to grind them with chilli. Shopkeepers usually have two or three other people sitting and watching her, to make sure she does not steal anything.

Masala machines are the greatest threat to her work. More and more shopkeepers are buying them, because they say it is cheaper. And they do not have to have people watching the machine to prevent theft.

She coughs and sneezes a lot from this work. And by constant pounding for 54 years, her whole body has been stiff. She wants a loan to help her family get a proper house, and education for her children and grandchildren, "so that their lives will not end up like ours". She added, "this money we earn from our own blood".

While Jhanjuban prefers shop work, Harkhiben prefers working at houses, because then she can bring the youngest of her seven children along, and tie her in a hammock while she grinds. Some problems with this are that chillies sometimes blow in the child's eyes, and it is difficult to get it over and quiet her again. Also, in the shops there is no guarantee when she will get home. She has to stay till the shopkeeper is satisfied with her supply. It is too difficult for her young children if she does not arrive home till 8 or 9 p.m.

These women's stories are typical of women involved in food processing work of many kinds. Their hours are long and physically strenuous. They do not get much remuneration for extremely monotonous work. The worst aspect though, usually, is that they have no guarantee of finding work on any given day. Some days they find no work. Other days they grind chillies for days on end. The Commission did not meet or find any report of men doing work with chilli anywhere in India. Women harvest, women dry, women clean the seeds, women grind. Women take the burn of chilli for whatever small sum they can garner.

The Commission met a group of 15 women in Jabalpur, M.P., who had organized themselves into a spice pounders cooperative. Only six of them at a time can get work, and they have difficulty marketing their products. They are not traditional spice grinders. This was a scheme they created to help them to earn some money. The project officer of Women and Child Development commented that they tried to make recommendations and buy their products, but they were generally not upto good quality standards. They need proper training by skilled trainers.

Women in Almora, U.P., were doing a little better with their chilli processing. They were making powder and pickles which they bartered for grains and pulses at the weekly haat. They were getting market value for the products, even if no cash.

One advantage to many kinds of food processing jobs is that they can be done during the off-season of agriculture. Chillies can be ground the year round. Potatoes can be stored for long periods of time to later be made into chips or other salted snacks, offering alternative employment to agricultural labourers.

In Ahmedabad the Commission met Chanduben, a representative of women who do groundnut

shelling in winter. She said 10-15 women from each village go to Jamnagar district for shelling. Men and women get the same wage, Rs. 10/day, but men rarely accept this work. These are hand picked seeds for exports, and the women get sore, cracked, swollen lips from the weeks of endless shelling.

Almora women have figured out a scheme to salvage their unsold milk. They make 'khoya' out of their surplus and sell it in the next day's market. It does not spoil because of their cool weather, and they earn Rs. 1.50 for each kilo they sell.

In the Rajkot meeting, one woman told about the samosa business she began after getting a Rs. 1100 loan from the Women's Bank. She and her daughter-in-law make samosas, and her two sons go to sell them at two cinemas. They earn Rs. 100/day with all four of them working. She has seen a big increase in income since taking the loan.

The President of the Women's Bank in Rajkot suggested to the Commission that the provision of subsidy should be extended to voluntary agencies who give loans to poor women for productive purposes. Then another voluntary agency worker said that because poor women are so used to being wage labourers, they need special extensive training to bring them into self-employment. At this point a third worker complained that Women's Economic Development Corporation has not been helpful at all.

In Udaipur the Commission met papad rollers at Hathi Pole who were self-employed. They buy the ingredients and produce the papad which they sell to traders who either export them or sell on the open market. They can sell as many as they make. Their only demand was working capital. Their economics work like this: From two kg of flour they can earn Rs. 8-10 in four hours. If they had capital, they could double their daily purchases and sales. They did not like the idea of buying and selling collectively because, as they said, though they are of one caste, there is no unity amongst them. They belong to a community called Purabia. The traditional occupation of their men was liquor distilling which has been stopped by the government. Now they do casual labour at jobs like truck driving or cleaning.

Papad rolling employs the largest number of women involved in food processing. This, like bidi rolling, has some minimum wage and other protective legislation. But also like bidi, it is almost always given out of piece rate, thus evading any legal responsibilities towards workers.

In Rajkot, papad rollers told the Commission that they earned Rs. 2.50 Kg. of papad, but that 80 gms. is routinely rejected, regardless of quality. Most rollers were earning a little less than Rs. 5/-day.

Then the Commission visited the Lijjat Papad sub-centre in Valod village, district Surat. They met the core workers of the group and the manager. There are 476 women in Lijjat's main centre in town and 250 women working in villages. They all take the dough from the centre and roll at home. Lijjat started its operations 17 years ago, and they are registered under the Public Trust Act.

Chandraben was the oldest worker there. She said they started with only 15 women who went to Bombay and took training at the main centre. The second year they had 45 women, by the 4th year, 300. Training is in learning the standardized proportions of spices, size, weight, etc.

She said it was initially difficult to involve women of all castes and communities. They had to do a lot of extension work. Now they are one-third Muslims, one-third tribals, and one-third others. Because tribals never had such traditional skills, they required extensive training.

Anyone can become a member by rolling 3 kgs. of papad. Most women are attracted to this work because they can do it at home. They take prepared dough from the centre by weight, and return the finished papad. Their accounts are very simple, specific tables which are easy to understand. Last year they all got a Rs.700 Diwali bonus.

During the meeting, a tribal woman said, "Before, we used to go for agricultural work in the fields for Rs.3/day. Now we remain home and earn Rs. 6." When asked the secret of her success, she replied, "Kaam-ma Lagan' (dedication to work) and cleanliness."

At this point the manager stepped into the conversation. He appeared with all his benevolence, most powerful. He spoke for Lijjat saying, "Production units like this should *not* be treated as commercial units. It is not possible to follow the Minimum Wages Act and Provident Fund Act. There should be an alternative set of rules for women's organizations like this." Then he went on to complain of "certain forces" that encourage strikes, unrest, fair employment practices—with the support of some journalists.

when these forces began to be felt, Lijjat extracted a pledge from each member to promise to be loyal to the Centre.

The Commission left the Centre and went to visit some of the tribals houses. First they met Mangi, a landless woman who has been rolling papad for six years. She said the Centre is strict on women producing 35 papad from 400 gm. of dough. "So now I have learned how to count to 35. My husband still cannot," she said giggling. She had never even rolled a roti before taking up this work. They make thick big 'rotlas' with their two hands. She earns about Rs.16/day.

Dhapu earns Rs. 19.50/day. The Commission saw her name and payment listed in the register..

A young tribal girl named Dhani said that her mother was a domestic worker in a landlord's house (for Rs. 20/month) and also worked in the fields for Rs. 10/day, during the season. Now she has learned papad rolling and brings an additional Rs. 50/month home from this.

Bhani, like many women in the area, prefers papad rolling to agricultural work because it is in the home, where it is easier to care for the children. It is quite evident in this area that agricultural wages have gone up because of women's preference for papad work.

Pushpa, a middleclass member of the Managing Committee, also rolls papad for some independent income of her own. According to her eight hours of work would come to Rs. 550/month. She said one advantage of the Lijjat unit in the village is that it brings three different communities together to work. This causes certain differences to vanish.

The Commission got interested in this idea, and one member asked her, "Do you take up other social issues as a group then?"

Her face drew closed as she said, "No. We do not want to lose our income. We do not take up other issues."

Another Managing Committee member, Nasim Banu, spoke up quickly to say, "Women gain a lot of confidence through this work. Women give strength to other women, even unconsciously."

Chandraben added that the additional income has definitely helped in getting the children educated, and that their new Savings and Loan Society has 450 members.

The Commission left the papad town Valod with a memorandum from the management pleading to be exempted from labour laws. The memorandum stole the spirit of the success story of Lijjat papad.

## VENDORS AND HAWKERS

### "Do Tokri Ki Jagaah...."

Although Nagmani has been selling vegetables and seasonal fruits in Hyderabad for the past 35 years, she still does not have a secure place to sit and vend. She is not allowed to sit on the road where all her potential customers are passing, unless, of course, she pays the police with fruits and vegetables and a bribe of Rs. 35-100, depending on their mood. If she fails to meet their demands, she gets thrown into jail, her baskets and goods are confiscated. Once during a hot summer day, they beat her up badly. Ever since then she has been changing from place to place, market to market, always on the lookout. "Hence my business never settles down," she lamented. In this state of fear of harassment, she earns about Rs. 20-25/day. Her priorities are a legitimate place in the market, and a license fee and/or rent of a space in the market if it is legally given.

Vegetable vendors in Ahmedabad face these difficulties even more. They are not allowed to travel by city transport bus with their produce. Therefore they have to walk the long distance from the wholesale market to the city market to the city market with heavy loads, or pay Rs. 10 by scooter—half of their day's earnings. Surajben said, "To pay that scooter fare, I have to borrow money so that I can bring more produce to off-set the loss. Then I reach the market and the police begin to harass me for bribes. They are never satisfied. Then my baskets might be confiscated. If this happens, how do I manage to even pay the 10% daily interest, much less the loan itself? We are 'vepari' (business people). Why are we treated like criminals?"

When the Commission asked the group of vendors what their priority was, they unanimously said, "Do tokri ki jagaah" (Space for two baskets). Then they took up the story of how in recent years the police and municipal authorities do not let them sit on the road in front of the market, so that cars can



park there. Once, when the authorities tried to grant them a market outside the city where they could have space, they said, "Why do you not ask the cars to be parked over there instead?"

In the Madras market, Chintamani sells fruits. She buys them for Rs. 80 daily, and earns about Rs. 25/day—before expenses. She has to daily give Rs. 1-2 to the police. Then she has to pay the shopkeeper the installment on the Rs. 300 loan she took from him. The interest alone is Rs. 15/day. After she gives him the interest and Rs. 3 and 4 on the capital, she is left with Rs. 3-5 for her living expenses.

Kandamandal sells vegetables near Chintamani. She took a loan of Rs. 500 and pays back Rs. 3/day.

Selvi, a flower seller, borrows Rs. 50 every day. The interest rate is Rs. 1/day. She says her business is not doing well. The flowers perish too quickly. From Rs. 50 purchase, she makes Rs. 10/day. One rupee goes to the moneylender. The remaining nine supports her and her children. They lived on the pavement, which sometimes gets flooded with water.

Another woman sells tamarind. She buys 50 kg. and sells about 12-15 kg. daily. She earns Rs. 12/day. From this she repays some of her Rs. 150 loans, on which she pays 10% interest per day.

In the Bombay slums, vendors complained about not being able to sell their vegetables at the regular place. The police harass them constantly, between arrivals of the Municipal van which lifts all their baskets once a week. They have to pay a regular bribe of Rs. 10. "We have to tolerate this because we have no licence. And no one will give us a licence!" One woman present complained. "If I were allowed to sell without harassment, without bribes, without constant fear—I would be able to earn Rs. 40/day, instead of Rs. 10 or 15, like now." All the women agreed that their priorities were a place in the market, working capital, and a license.

Another such vendor in Pune said that despite having a Railway Vendor's Pass, she is being harassed while moving her goods from the farmers market in the railway market. "It is just because I am a 'jawan aurat' (youthful woman)!"

The vendors at Ukhrul, Manipur, said their problems were transportation. They now have to buy their vegetables from middlemen who bring them from Imphal, and it is too expensive. They want cheap, regular transportation service, so that they can buy goods at wholesale rates themselves. They cannot get loans for their business, because the banks want to see assets, and (as they told the Commission) their village was too far outside the bank's 16 km radius policy.

In a Singhbhum, village in Bihar, a tribal named Serfa sells chicken at the weekly haat. Her problem is that big customers often snatch away her basket of chicken, throwing only a small amount of money at her face. They are on bicycles, so she cannot catch them. "Once I was walking to the haat holding two chicken in my hand, he snatched them from my hand, without giving a paise! I take care to raise these birds during the whole week, and then I am robbed of everything. I thought of hiring a cyclickshaw to take me there, but I do not raise enough chicken to be able to afford to pay for the rickshaw."

In the Bangalore slum, Pungawaran sells her famous idlis which she had been vending for 50 years. She took up this occupation at the age of 12 when their mother deserted them. She was the oldest of seven children, and her father was a landless agricultural labourer. She makes 50-60 idlis a day. She sells them from 8-10 a.m. Her problem is that clients eat idlis on credit and often do not get around to paying. She charges 10 paise per idli. She said she cannot make more because she lacks capital. If she had Rs. 100, she could earn more. She could buy more supplies, and hire a child to help her. She had no complaint about the police.

. Another woman in Madras is also selling idlis, but her profit margin is larger because she sells tea with hers. Govindamma was widowed 30 years back. Her husband's small tea shop was demolished after that, so she took to serving from her small house. She is also faced with the problem that customers eat on credit and do not pay. She earns Rs. 15/daily. Her priority is widowhood pension.

A channa (chickpea) vendor in the Bombay slum buys her chickpeas in the wholesale market and roasts, salts, and packages them at home. For 33-1/2 kg channa, she earns about Rs. 10/day. But the police and municipal harassment is intolerable. She wants a license desperately. "If you cannot give me a license," she said to the Commission, "at least give me a card of some sort, or some paper."

However, not all women vendors are in such dire circumstances. The Commission met a very innovative vendor in the Kulu market who had opened a small chemist's booth. She is a B.Sc. pass in

Chemistry. Her father is a poor farmer. She used to sell drugs from their home, but now she rents this place for Rs.10/month. Her little brother helps her there. She sells herbal medicines, ayurvedic drugs, and herbs. She often buys from women bringing these plants from the mountains. She knows about these things because her grandfather was a Ayurvedic 'Vaid'. There is a good local market for her products. She was very enthusiastic about her business and told the Commission that next she wanted a bigger place, and more working capital.

Another woman in the Kulu Market sells readymade garments her husband brings from Ludhiana and Delhi. Her daily turnover is Rs. 100-250. The net profit ranges from Rs. 50-80. Her main problem is space in the market. The police do not harass her, but other officials do. If she gives them a bribe, they do not bother her for the next two months.

A Kulu vendor who sells in the town's largest market felt more harassed than these women. She said there are more women vendors than men, but men sell industrial goods and consume most of the space, while women sell vegetables, fruits, eggs and fish from small baskets.

A shoe vendor who sells in this market rents a space at Rs.400/month. She walks to the town eight miles away where she buys the shoes. Then she returns in a bus with the goods. Her present stock was worth Rs.2000-2500. She earns Rs. 600-700 per month, and does better during melas. But the shop rent was hurting. She uses her money to support her ill husband and two daughters.

The Commission also visited a H.P. haat in Kafota, where they saw women selling vegetables, handlooms, handknits, pots, roots, and herbs. They were bright and talkative and open. They come here twice a week to this market near the temple.

At another haat in Kausani, U.P., the Commission was impressed by the woollen handknitted garments the women of the Bhootia tribe produce and sell. Other tribal women there were selling herbs, roots, and vegetables.

Another innovative vendor the Commission met was a woman in Hyderabad who exchanges vessels for used garments. She gets the clothes more cheaply by exchanging vessels than if she paid cash for them, because people are happy to take something new and useful for their old clothes. She buys the vessels in wholesale for Rs.500. She goes street to street trading. She has to take her children with her, as there is no one at home to watch them. She repairs, cleans and presses the clothes at night. The police do not harass her, but the traders always find fault with the clothes and pay her low prices. Thus she prefers to sell at the market. She gets from Rs. 2-20 per article. She earns about Rs. 500/month this way. She wants a loan for Rs. 1000, and a license or I.D. card for safety.

In Bombay, used garment dealers are harassed more than the other vendors, because they have to enter housing colonies and multi-storeyed residential complexes. Anytime someone reports a garment is lost or stolen, they are the first to be suspected as culprits. They want licenses, and proper storage facilities, as they cannot store the clothes in their own tiny, crowded, vulnerable slum rooms. They are ready to pay rent for a storage place, as long as it is less than the high charge the traders near the market exact from them now.

A Bombay vendor organizer told the Commission that the problems of hawkers needed to be taken up by government and thoroughly discussed. They have been talking of having hawking zones for 22 years, but still nothing has happened. "In 22 years, their pockets have been filling from what they pull out of ours."

The most impressive market the Commission visited was the women's market in Imphal, Manipur. It has been in existence since 1891, and till today it is completely a women's market. On one side they sell all their food products, from spices to fruits and vegetables to grains to meats. On the other side are all their beautiful handlooms and handknitted and readymade garments. Women sit with their sewing machines, or vend tea, or barter their medicinal herbs. Across the length of the market stretch 590 parallel raised platforms, upon which the women sit, facing the alleys which run between them. Under their platforms are strong boxes where they can store their goods at night. Each woman has a small kerosene lamp which she lights in front of her produce after dark. The customers walk between two rows of women vending their things. Everyone is covered by a shed roof, which gives them shade in the hot season, and a dry place to work in the rains. It is a throbbing, vibrant market where lakhs of rupees change hands each day.

The Commission learned about the women's recent sleep-in-night-vigil strike that took place in this market while they were visiting Manipur, and they went to investigate. They arrived at the market at 10 p.m. No men are allowed inside at night. On their raised platforms, the Commission saw that women had strung up their mosquito nets. This was their sleeping place at night. Each woman had a small light marking the place of her vigil. They were undressed, retired, some cooking or eating supper, others were singing bhajans or mala. The Commission members asked for their leader, and in no time they were led to Sakhi, a strong middle-aged woman. Then the word spread, and all the women assembled and freely discussed their problems with the Commission.

Sakhi told them that this protest vigil was on, because the government had plans to vacate this market and rebuild it—without the women's consent. The first plan was to move the market outside the town, because this is now valuable urban space. The officials showed them the place, and the women refused to move. Who would go way out to that place to buy?

Then they came up with their second plan. They would rebuild the market into a modern multi-storeyed super market and shopping complex, where the vendors would also be accommodated. Sakhi said, "We know what will happen then. They will keep Rs. 10,000 as the rental charge of the shops. Which of my women could afford that? It means the big traders will then move in, and usurp our market. They plan all sorts of shops for electrical goods, radios, fancy clothing and beauty saloon. That means it will no longer be a vegetable market. Nor a women's market. We simply refuse to allow it." Sakhi was very strong.

The blueprint has been modified twice by HUDCO and shown to these women for approval. Delegations have come to Delhi to meet the State Ministers and plead their case. The dispute is still not settled. And still the women have not agreed to any of the government schemes.

The Commission left the Women's Market that night, sensing the essence of the vendors' protest: the market is a matter of life and death for them, as land is for the farmer.

The Commission met the Acting Chief Minister next day, who said very sympathetic words about 'my vending mothers'.

## CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

### "We Only See These Stones...."

Thirteen women were sitting on an open slope in Shiulaha village, Banda District, U.P., when the Commission passed in their jeep. It was 12.30 p.m. The sun was at its peak, scorching hot. There was no tree in sight. The women continued on though, at their work, pounding and pounding to crush stones. The 13 of them earn Rs. 34 for filling two trolleys with their crushed stone. This comes to less than Rs. 3 per woman for an entire day's work. But they do not get this work everyday—the trolleys come irregularly.

Once someone came from the village, promising to give charkhas and Khadiwork to the women. He collected Rs. 10 from each of them, and never returned.

When asked about their contractor's name, their supervisor, the government officials, and Department details, they had no idea about any of them. One woman said, "We do not know whose stones we are crushing, we do not see who pays our wages, nor do we see how much is actually paid to our Supervisor. We only know these stones—nothing else."

One day from Allahabad to Banda district, the Commission stopped on the roadside where Kol women were involved in construction work. Some were digging stones out from the earth; others were crushing them. Forty-six families involved in this work had been camping there for many years. The women gathered and hesitantly talked about their work. They work 15-20 days a month. Wages are paid to the group. They get Rs. 200 for loading one truck. Although there is a fixed size truck for this rate, the contractor always sends a larger one, with no increase in payment. Each truck is loaded by five workers, usually three men and two women. The truck comes once in 10-15 days.

There is no difference in the work of men and women. Both break stones, and do loading. This is government work, given out on contract to the thekedar. He takes no signature upon receiving payment. They take advances from him when needed—which is most of the time. He deducts the advance from their wages, plus an extra Rs. 10 for Rs. 150 they borrow. The payment of wages is done to their men,

because "they are our maliks"

Originally these workers came from Rewa district in M.P., but that was 20-30 years ago. Many have no belonging in their native place, no land, no houses. They all leave at Holi and return in the monsoon. They also go back for marriages.

In the nine working months they go to work early, without food. In the afternoon they return home, and cook food. Once in seven days, they go to collect firewood. Though the forests seem close, they have to walk very far. They give Rs. 3 to the forest guard who allows them to collect wood.

They want regular work throughout the year. Their earnings are not sufficient to even fill their bellies. Their camp was on the roadside, on government land. Hence, the authorities often evict them. They retreat to the forest for a while, then come back.

People working at the worksite breaking stones receive payment every 15 days. Women get Rs. 9. girls Rs. 5. Men get Rs. 11, boys Rs. 7. The little girl labourers were miniature copies of their mother—already married, heads covered, breaking stones, headloading. The muster stated that 32 workers were on duty for the day. All 32 names were men's. We counted a total of 43 workers: 3 men, 14 children, and 26 women, on-the-spot, there and then. The supervisor could only answer "that's the way it goes here".

None of the workers vote, and none of the women know anything about payment because it all passes through their men's hands.

In the Simla, H.P., meeting, other road construction women came to meet the Commission. Pansara, a young woman of 16 to 17 years, said that she did not know which was her native place, she has been here so long. She began working at stone breaking in Nahar when she was 10. She earns Rs. 12/day—the same as men on the worksite. They get no maternity benefits, so they work till the last, and resume work 4 or 5 days after delivery. They all live right on the construction site. She did not know how migrant workers arrived there for work. She thought the contractor brought them.

Her eight-year-old sister was injured while working with her mother. She was taken to the hospital in Chandigarh and given treatment worth Rs. 500—in her mother's name, who was eligible for treatment. Pansara got married five years back to a man who also works there. When the Commission probed her about her roots, she struggled and said, "Why does it matter? We were born here, and we will die here breaking these stones."

Another woman working with Pansara said she came from Chamba with 30 others from her village because they had no water for irrigation. The contractor paid their bus fare and deducted it from their wages. She said their daily diet consisted of rice and salt. Sometimes they had tea at the site, but never in their homes. Not even men—"We cannot afford tea." She said firewood was scarce and expensive.

In Jammu the Commission met other women road constructors on the highway to Delhi. They were working on the highroad while their huts and colourful saris were spread in the low areas. Thirty-five of them gathered and huddled against each other to sit and talk with the Commission. Their deep green and deep blue sari revealed their Bilaspur, M.P. origin. "Those women will wear those blue cheap, short saris even if they go to the end of the world."

Entire families worked here. The oldest people tended the homes and small children. All the older children and other adults worked. They have land at home, but no irrigation facilities, so have suffered famine for the last 10 years. Their only alternative is Famine Relief Work in their state where workers earn only Rs. 5 (women) or Rs. 9 (men)—all given in grains.

So they migrate here to earn Rs. 12.50/day. If they miss a day, however, Rs. 27 is deducted. The women's names are included on the muster roll, and their signatures taken. No maternity leave or creche is available. They pay their own medical expenses. They often get burned from tarring work. Women resume work one month after childbirth. Their houses are kachcha and they often have to spend Rs. 200-250 for repairs, "We have to spend for everything except water!" one woman complained.

Their priorities were Rs. 18/day = Rs. 540/month and that this kind of work should be available at their native place.

In Bangalore the Commission met women involved in building construction work. At many of the worksites the Commission found creches being run by a voluntary agency. They care for children aged

3-13 years. The contractor has given the place on the site. They are provided with milk, vegetable curry, and rice for lunch. A doctor visits them regularly. Parents do not have to pay for these services—the voluntary agencies and some contractors contribute funds.

These workers have migrated from Gulbarga and Kajhori districts because of severe drought and lack of work. The women work till the 9th month of pregnancy and resume after 15-30 days. They earn Rs. 9/day.

Even PWD construction workers in Kulu, H.P., hired directly by the department, are not receiving equal wages. Women got Rs. 12/day while men got Rs. 15/. And there was no childcare service provided.

One voluntary agency in Bhopal said that almost nowhere were equal wages paid. They felt that the principal employers should be held responsible and fined. They claimed even contractors for government buildings did not comply with fair wages practices.

In Madras, representatives of construction workers unions presented the Commission a memorandum stating that these workers number 5 lakhs in Tamilnadu. Contracting and subcontracting reduces workers to a very low status. Women occupy the lowest rung. They do masonry labour, earth work, mosaic work, roofing, and concrete work. Although these are all skilled jobs, and backbreaking tasks, they are labelled 'unskilled' and therefore paid the lowest rates. They are denied training and access to improving their skills.

Usually the workers on big construction projects are recruited by sub-contractors, housed on the site, and paid very low wages by the big contractor—Rs. 7-13/day. They are usually assured employment as long as the project lasts. Other methods of finding jobs are: being part of a labour team whose 'Mistri' (gangman) secures work for his gang. He is usually the 'mason', and all the others are considered his helpers; waiting in the market at a known place where contractors do recruiting on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

Because of the "bonded quality of the labour, such insecurity as employment, the changing contractors and work places, it is very difficult to demand minimum wages or social security. The employer will simply hire a different gang. The union asked for a Central legislation to regulate employment through a Labour Board, which should have a fair representation of women, and be able to levy a tax on the industry for social security use.

Many women complained that laws like Maternity Benefits Act, and E.S.I. Act do not apply because of the absence of a permanent employer-employee relationship. This Board could be responsible for disbursing these benefits from the cess levy fund.

Another complaint women gave about legislation regarding their employment, was this curfew law. "We are not allowed to do contracting and terracing work which pay higher because we cannot work after 7 p.m., as per law! Why are only the laws which hurt implemented? What about laws like Minimum Wages or Contract Labour? We should be able to work overtime and be paid for it just like men are!"

Laxmi then spoke up to add, "We are not even paid half of the Rs. 17/day minimum wage. And then I broke my leg and was bedridden for three months, no one gave medical assistance. And still there is some defect with my leg."

Govindamma, though she has been a construction worker for 27 years, still earns Rs. 12/day while even inexperienced men get Rs. 20. Masons get Rs. 35/day, there are no women masons—"Even after 27 years of practice," she said, "they do not consider us suitable for 'skilled' jobs." Five years back, she earned Rs. 11/day. "Prices have risen by leaps and bounds in the last five years, but my wage has only risen by Rs. 1/."

Rajasthani tribals in Udaipur district also have complaints about their wages. They are doing famine relief construction work due to the drought, but are not receiving wages. The daily labour rate is officially 7 kg grain/day, but they are only getting five kg. They requested cash for purchasing kerosene, tea and sugar, but so far their request is "pending".

In Pai village women face the same problems, except that they only receive their meagre foodgrain payment once in a fortnight.

Assamese women at Holewar Barpukhuri are migrant construction workers involved in pond

cleaning projects. They earn Rs. 12/day, but weekly they get only Rs. 50 in cash. The rest is paid in foodgrains. All their children come along to the worksite with them. They are skilled in agriculture and cattle care, but "we are ready to learn anything!"

## Domestic workers

Mariamamma's mother worked as a domestic worker all of Mariamma's life. When she died, Mariamma took over her mother's job in the same family. She was paid Rs. 150/month plus her food. The entire house and care of the family was her responsibility. "For everything, everybody top to bottom asked me for my help and support—I even for my advice. I am happy there, and secure. They took care of me," she told the Commission when they met her in the Madras city meeting. After some years there, the daughter of the house got married to a rich man's son. The son-in-law began visiting the house. "After while, he started coming frequently at the time I was all alone in the house. I started feeling very insecure, and before anything could happen to me, I left the job. The lady was surprised, but she did not say anything to me." Now she goes to construction sites to work for Rs. 12/day. She said, with the great dignity she possessed, "It is very hard work for me, but I will get used to it."

In another meeting, in the Bangalore city slum, the Commission heard variations of the same theme. Saroja, a woman living there in the slum, starts her day at 5.30 a.m. She fetches 6-7 pitchers of water from the communal tap, cooks, bathes the children, feeds the family leftovers from the night before, and leaves the slum by 7 a.m. She spends Rs. 1.50 each day, going and coming between her place and her employer's house. When she arrives there, she makes their breakfast, takes the children to school, cleans the house, and cooks the evening meal. She gets two cups of tea and some leftover food during the day, and leaves by 6.30 p.m. She earns Rs. 85/month. She spends Rs. 45 of this on her bus fare. Her biggest grudge is that she is not allowed to go home when her children are ill. Or, if she insists, they deduct from her wages. When she told this part of her story, many of her colleagues stood up in the meeting and demanded a creche for their children.

Once Saroja had mentioned her frustration about her children being left alone, other women stood up to tell their problems. One of Saroja's 14 year old neighbours was beaten by her employer when she was accused of stealing a gold chain. They later found the chain with the employer's driver. Others mentioned sexual harassment in the families where they work, and all the ways they tried to make themselves invisible in the house, so they could get the work done without being molested. Many of them live in constant fear of either being sexually abused, or, if they protest, of losing their jobs. Many complained about the lack of job security. None of them had guaranteed employment from one day to the next;

Eighty-eight women from their slum row of 120 houses are domestic workers. They form part of the 504 domestic servants who have unionized themselves in Bangalore to protest against the exploitative, oppressive conditions they are forced to work under. They have learned how to verbalize the oppressive situations that most domestic workers have to suffer in silence. They have staged dharnas, and organized mass processions and public meetings to demand changes. They presented a memorandum to the Commission, stating their demands. They want the Labour Department to register all domestic workers. To accomplish this, they demanded a Commission be set up to:

- (a) Enumerate all the domestic workers in the city and inquire into the problems of domestic workers and their standard of living, and
- (b) recognize them as a work force, and fix minimum wages for their work; grant welfare benefits such as bonus, gratuity, maternity benefits, health insurance, creches for their children, and housing facilities.

All 504 members signed or put their thumbprints next to their names, endorsing this document. It carries important messages that speak for all domestic workers.

When the Commission met the Central union representatives in Bombay they also were demanding recognition of domestic servants as "workers", and minimum wages of Rs. 750/month. They said the total number of domestic workers in Bombay was four lakhs, and 60% of them are women. They said women do part time work in up to 10 houses each earning Rs. 35 to 350/month. Full time workers earn Rs. 150-600. Most of them work from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. Most of the Bombay

domestic workers are illiterate, although third generation Bombay families had studied up to 9th standard. These women suffer from skin problems because of the caustic soaps and cleansers they work with all day, as well as weakness and spine deformities from constant work. They said an educated woman domestic worker would find it difficult to get an educated husband. Kesaibai mentioned about the lift sign at 7-storeyed building of Pedder Road where she works. It reads: "Servants-Dogs-Luggage: NOT ALLOWED".

Fatima also lives in the Bombay slum. Everyday she has to go to Mahim to work, which takes half an hour to walk from there. She leaves at 5.30 a.m. She works in a Muslim family's house, doing all the work from cleaning to cooking, for Rs. 50/month. There are several other workers like her in this neighbourhood. "We talk a lot about our problems with one another, but even if we tried to unionize, who would listen to us?"

One 39 year-old woman, Mary, shifts from working in upperclass neighbourhoods in Bombay or Delhi, to the slums, when she is out of work. She was educated to SSC in the convent in Goa, because both her parents died. She deserted her first husband and two daughters in Bombay, while she was working as a maid, because her husband was prostituting her at night to get money for liquor. She ran away after five years of this treatment. Then she went to Delhi with her second husband. After two years, he also started drinking. She got several jobs as nanny, with quarters provided, because she could speak and read English well. She lost several of these jobs because of her husband's drunken habits. Then she and her small son would go a month or two together with practically no food, while her husband bought his alcohol on credit. Her next job's first wages always went to repaying his debts. They moved often, looking for jobs for her. He died last year from alcoholism. She has mixed feelings of relief, and vulnerability. "Now for the first time in 30 years, I can save some of my wages, and we have enough food. But where will we go if this job ends? I have no family of my own to stay with, and without a husband, I am treated as 'available' property. I just want my hair to turn white. I want to be old, so everyone will say, 'She is just a bag of bones', nothing attractive. I want to become a 'sanyasi'."

In a Pune meeting, the Commission met a representative of the Pune Shahar Molkarin Sanghatana. They said there are 30,000 domestic maids in the city. They told how they had staged a ten day strike in 1986 to demand a 30 per cent rise in wages, one day off every fortnight, a bonus at Diwali, "proper, respectful treatment," and no deductions for sickness. The strike had no immediate effect, but it gradually strengthened them and improved conditions. They have been demanding the Labour Commissioner for seven years to appoint a Committee to investigate their complaints, but no action has been taken.

Induben explained to the Commission how they handle their problems now, since they lack government support. Three or four of them will go together to one woman's employer, and demand better facilities or employment conditions. They said in 20 out of 25 cases, they meet with success.

Sukhavant is a Punjabi domestic worker in Rajasashi district Amritsar. She cleans vessels in three places. She gets Rs. 30/month and tea at each place. She has three sons, one of whom works in a repair shop. Her husband is 'away'. She has no land. She said her priority is some alternative work, like weaving or dairying, "because I cannot stand the humiliation I always face when they scold me for no reason".

In Gauhati, Assam, social workers reiterated that one of the most exploited groups of workers is domestic maids. They average a monthly salary of Rs. 40-100. They have never tried to organize. Their one experience in fighting the system was when a woman was fired from her job for an alleged theft. A lawyer took up her case, and the court ordered her innocent, but because a domestic helper is not a "worker", they could not reinstate her.

Adalazmi has been a domestic worker for five years, since her husband deserted her when she was pregnant. Her five-year-old son goes to school. She works in two houses. She goes twice a day to each house, in the morning and evening. She does sweeping, washing, shopping, cooking, serves food and coffee. She brings home some of the food she makes for them. One household has four members, another eight. Each pays Rs. 50/month. At Christmas they give her a sari and clothes for her child. She is one Bangalore slum woman who thinks "there is no need to unionize". She was happy they raised her salary from Rs. 30 to Rs.50 without her asking. She does not want to demand more, but hopes they will



raise her salary to Rs. 60 next year. She said that her employers treat her well. They help her with Rs. 5-10 when her child is sick. She and her son stay with her mother in the slum. She pays Rs. 30/month for their hut. She said other domestic workers are better off because their husbands are also working. The biggest relief for her is that her son gets a mid-day meal in his school. "I am gone everyday from 6 a.m.—8 p.m. At least I know he is being fed."

Adalaxmi's resistance to putting any demands to her employers is a sensitive issue for most domestic workers. Their jobs are the personal realm, and the treatment they receive from their employers, or even the job itself, is put at risk by asking for even as small consideration of fairer wages or hours. Many domestic workers have contradictory feelings of gratitude and resentment towards their employers. The gratitude is that they at least have a job, and some food and protection. The resentment stems from seeing that their employer's housework and childcare is being completely handled by them, while their own is completely unattended—at wages that can barely feed the children in the very brief time the mother is in her own house each day.

## Endless Service

Satyamma is a traditional dai in the Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh. She has been helping women deliver their babies for 15 years with the skills she learned from her mother-in-law. She also received six months of additional training when she was a government functionary. Now she works for the government dispensary. There are dais in her village, from different castes. She is a scheduled caste, but all castes take her services. For each delivery in the village she earns Rs. 10 for a girl and Rs. 20 for a boy, even though "it takes the same amount of work". She found the training she received interesting and useful. "If I had a daughter-in-law, I could train her well" she said, in appreciation of both her training and her occupation.

Other women the Commission met who are participating in government service programmes faced greater frustration than Satyamma. In Jhilmili, Bankura district, West Bengal, four ICDS workers talked about some of their stumbling blocks. In the programme itself were holding aanganwadi for children of forest produce gatherers. They said the mothers were sending their children only at meal times and some were even taking the food home with them, so the purposes of nutrition and schooling were lost. Then they talked about their own work problems:

They said that as supervisors, they often have to walk 7-8 miles between villages or communities. They said it is not always safe to travel like this. They have no common place to meet the other workers. The salaries of the aanganwadi workers are very low. An SSC pass gets Rs. 275/- per month. After five years they get Rs. 300. Helpers get Rs. 110. Both jobs are time ones. In tribal areas where houses are very scattered, supervising 25 villages is difficult and less effective. If no transport is available, and they have to stay overnight, there is no accommodation for them. The stock of foodgrains they manage for lunch programme is a constant source of tension, "because people may get suspicious about their use." They said they very much like working with women health and extension workers. They suggested making a place in the village where they can stay together. Their priorities were better pay and accommodation.

In Bombay the Commission heard similar reports. ICDS aanganwadi teachers there also earned Rs. 275 (SSC pass) and Rs. 225 (non SSC). Besides keeping 14 registers, doing health check-ups, dispensing medicines, and cooking and serving nutritious food, they teach. They were not even granted maternity leave until last year. "The minimum pay should be Rs. 500/month," they told the Commission. "The present 'honorarium' ('Maandhan') is no honor."

Other ICDS women in Coimbatore, Karnataka Kulu, H.P., and Rajasthan all presented memoranda to the Commission, demanding higher salaries, and recognition.

In Pune the Commission met Anuradha, a nurse working in rural health extension programmes. She offered a lot of opinions based on her experience in the field. First of all, recalling her time as a nurse in a private hospital, she said she had observed many suicidal tendencies amongst women due to their men's drunkenness. She suggested that the nurses' evidence should be recorded in such cases. Secondly, she was concerned about the nurses' security when they are working in the village. She suggested that the ANM, health workers, childworkers, teachers, gramsevikas, and other such women

field workers should be provided a government house or hostel where they can all stay together. Thirdly, she suggested that health visits be given at women's work places, e.g. in the fields, rather than the village. She said during the day time, women are never found in their homes, while at the end of the day their free time is limited and they are tired.

While this health discussion was going on, Sushilabai mentioned the difficulties of the 800 hospital ayas attached to private hospitals in Pune. She said these ayas are not included as hospital staff in any regard. Even the unions refuse them membership. She gave a memorandum while a nurse complained about the contract systems both nurses and ayas were subjected to in the city's private hospitals.

Another group of women represented at this Pune meeting were the Devadasis, of whom there are many here. Most of them are girls of poor, landless, low caste families who dedicate their girls to the service of God. Their "services" are taken for granted by upper class men. Although this practice is sanctioned by tradition and religion, these women usually end up in prostitution or begging. There is no one to look after them when they grow old, and no source of income. Some of them develop diseases which remain untreated. In this meeting, they requested education for their daughters, old age homes, and some income generation programme. A blind woman asked for reservation for the blind in jobs, and special training in telephone exchanges, chalk making, or cane making.

At the Kolhapur Devadasi Vikas Centre, there were 50 devadasis present. Shantibai said that she was dedicated to the Devi because her father had promised (God) to do so if he got a son. Now her father is old and blind, and that son is in jail. The Commission heard numerous similar cases: they had been dedicated to God in exchange for a son.

Chhayabai and Ratnabai said they were made devadasis purely because of poverty "There was not enough at home to feed everyone." So they lived in the temple and got fed there. At the age of 13 they started serving the devi with men, and started bearing children. In all cases, the men do not stay with the devadasi or the children. Then the devadasis have to resort to begging. On Tuesday and Friday near temples they have some income out of begging alms. A few get jobs as domestic workers. But generally they have lost their capacity to earn by hard honest labour. Their priority is education for their children, which is problematical. Because the father's name is not given, the children are often not admitted.

A social worker there complained that devadasis are not given assistance under IRDP. The Secretary of Social Welfare who was present gave her assurance that she would take up their case.

In Calcutta the Commission met a group of activists who were helping to organise women who work in brothels. They had written the Commission in Delhi, and were eager to discuss their work and have the Commission members meet some of these women. They went to the mohallas where many prostitutes are working. The air was heavy with bidi smoke and the smell of excessive, low-quality liquor, consumed both by the women and their clients.

Sandhya is a 35-year-old woman from Birbhum district. Her husband became disabled 12 years ago in the village, and while his brothers support him, they had been harsh toward her and her daughter, saying they could not support them also. She had to find her own means of livelihood, so she came to Calcutta searching for employment. She began working as a maid servant. She was looking for better work when a local woman told her she had a better job for her. She tricked her into coming to a brothel in Sonagachhi—a large red light district of the city.

Though the service rate was very high here, whatever she earned went directly to the brothel keeper. She was only left with food and the minimum required clothing. After a while she left this brothel for Sethi Bagan. She gets a lower rate here, but she is self-employed. The payment in this district ranges Rs. 15-50. The night before the Commission visited her, she earned from Rs. 30. She pays Rs. 12 per night to rent her space, plus electricity charges. Now she is able to send Rs. 200 to her parents every month. She goes to her elder daughter's place during Pooja, and sometimes goes to her own village also. No one there is aware of her present vocation. No relative has ever come to visit her here. From her small savings she has bought a 1500 square feet plot in her mother's village. After her younger daughter's education is completed and she is married, she will settle on that land with her mother.

She said they suffer no harassment from either the police or the local 'dadas'. The women colleagues are helpful to each other in times of difficulty. Otherwise, they stick to their own business.

because there is too much competition. Sandhya was not aware of any laws like SITA.

She visits a doctor for regular check-ups once every two months. It costs Rs. 30-50 with the doctor at the corner. Now that she has a better income, she can have meat, milk and fish to eat.

Shrimati came here from Bangladesh in 1947, when she was 16. Although she is nearing 60, she told the Commission she was 40. She was brought here by some people. She did not know where she was being taken. For the last 10-15 years she has stopped working. She stays in a very tiny place. One of her old clients who sell toys gives her Rs. 2-3 each day. She said she had a lot of problems: livelihood, ill-health, V.D. She complained that the general hospitals were very condescending to women like her. "We can be easily identified from our appearance, anywhere —from our dress, etc.," she said. Even at 60, she did not wish to dress like an "ordinary" woman.

Another young woman in that lane, sitting in a corner, looked depressed. She had fever for many days due to V.D. She said she was 22 and also from Birbhum district. She came here out of her own choice three years ago, because there was so much poverty and no work in her village. She is one of four sisters and two brother. She said when she is unwell she does not take any customer, which means no income. Thus her small saving gets spent, because these days, she is sick on an average of 10 days a month. When she works, she get an average of Rs. 15/day. She said if work were available, she would like to go back to her village. "But it will not happen," she said, "because the condition of my village is getting worse, not better."

The Commission later spoke to the Secretary of their organisation. Asha comes from Jessore, which is now in Bangladesh. Her mother-in-law was in this vocation and gave Asha this building. She has been working here for many years, and has given up prostitution herself. There are 50 members. They help those above 50 year old, like Shrimati, who no longer have an income, because there is no one else to look after them here. Most of them are ill. If not, they help them get domestic work, though they are not easily accepted in families. The organisation also helps with the children's education. They are planning boarding facilities for them. They have started a training centre in tailoring for the women and children. They have some funds collected from amongst themselves and the public. Political parties began intervening, but they refused their shelter. "Are they interested in us beyond our votes?" Asha asked. "For not joining them, we of course faced some harassment— like a bomb blast in our lane, but our organisation is firm in not wanting any political affiliation."

She told the Commission members, "Girls come here because of poverty and unemployment. If one of them does not get a client for 2-3 days, she is ready to come down to Rs. 3 or 4."

The Commission also met dhobi women (laundresses) in many places, doing from one to all of the tasks involved in cleaning and ironing clothes. In Rajkot, due to scarcity of water, one couple was not taking up washing work. They were ironing clothes for their customers in a 400-unit housing quarter. The husband goes to collect and deliver the clothes, while she presses. She gets Re. 1 per sari, and 80 paise per shirt. She irons about 50 pieces of clothing a day, and this gives her work for 3-4 hours. They gross about Rs. 500/month, but after electricity charges, it comes to only Rs. 250-300.

Another laundress who also does ironing is taken advantage of because she is a lone woman. "My husband is handicapped, and because I am here alone people try to get work free, or on credit." Her relatives helped establish her ironing table. She earns about Rs. 350/month. Her three children go to school. "They are good in their studies, so I do not waste their time by making them help." She tried to get a bank loan earlier, but they demanded a guarantee, and she could not get one. She said there are too many dhobis in competition with one another for any of them to make a good income.

Another women ironing clothes in the Bombay slum said she earns Rs. 15/day. She works from 7 a.m. on the table in front of her house. She said at night, her two children study on that table, and the family also eats on it. her problem is to keep the customers clothes away from all the dirt. This is a serious problem in the monsoon.

Jivuba is one of the many women cart pullers in Ahmedabad. She has been doing this work since she was six years old—first with her mother, now with her husband. They earn Rs. 45-50 daily between the two of them, pulling in the groundnut oil whole—sale market. They carry the oil between whole-saler and retailer, and do stacking work. She has had three children, with two miscarriages in between. She said she does not need any special food for this strenuous work, except an extra pinch of

jaggery now and then. The handcart is their own. Five years ago they were renting it for Rs. 45 per month. They are harassed constantly by the police, who do not allow them to park their cart. And she is annoyed at the frequently changing schedule of when traffic can pass on certain roads. "It should be announced in public when they are going to close certain roads. Otherwise we have to walk longer distances," she said. "And in this business, every step counts."

Each step also counts if you are a ragpicker like Ambaben. Her life is typical of the many ragpickers in our cities. She gets up at 4 a.m., drinks tea, and goes into the street with her bag slung over her shoulder. Sometimes her six-year-old son joins her. She picks up waste paper, rubber, iron, wood, leather—all from the streets, bending, lifting, filling her bag, bending, filling, lifting the ever-heavier bag as dawn breaks over the city. By 12 p.m. she is back home. She bathes, cooks, eats, and then carries her goods to the waste trader's place. She carries the previous evening's haul as well as that morning's. She puts what cash he gives her in her pocket, and heads back to the streets to repeat the entire process of bending, filling, lifting, bending, examining, lifting, hoisting the full bag up. She returns home by 5.30 p.m., and once again, bathes, cooks, feeds her son, sorts the haul, and then goes to sleep by 9 p.m. Her daily earnings come to Rs. 8-10—it all depends on what she finds. A big problem is the low price of wastepaper. At Kandla port, wastepaper is now being imported, which Ambaben considers sinful.

In Jammu, the Commission met some sweepers in their meeting. Most were Christians, yet they were still treated as untouchables. A few were Muslims. They said that of the 700 sweepers working in the Jammu Municipality, women made up the majority. Their group leader Inayatbibi said that right from the stage of getting a temporary job they have to face injustice and exploitation. To find a job, they have to give bribes of Rs. 1000-2000. Then they get only daily wage jobs. Some women who have been working for 30 years still are daily wages. Because of these problems, all the workers, men and women, went on strike for five days. Ninety—all women—workers were thrown out. Lawyers helped to get them reinstated after two years, but no back wages were given. The victimized women were ridiculed on all sides. They could not get domestic work during this unemployed period due to their "untouchability". Their priority was jobs for their educated daughters.

Other sweepers in Gandhidham, Kutch district, Gujarat, faced similar problems. These workers sweep the road for the Municipal Corporation. Hima was still considered part time after 18 years. She earns Rs. 20/day, but wants to be made permanent so that she is eligible for the benefits other employees get. Peva, a woman who has been working there for five years, said that every 15 days they give her a break in the work to maintain her 'casual' status. Her total monthly income comes to Rs. 500. She receives no bonus, leave, or medical benefits. She has made many representations, but has received no response except false promises.

Dock sweepers at Kandla Port have better circumstances than those Municipal employees. There are 39 old women, nearing 80 years of age, who are permanent employees of the port. They used to be loaders and unloaders, but due to old age they have been given lighter work. They have been working here as long as 22 years, they were made permanent only five years ago. Their gross salary is Rs. 1350, but after deductions they get Rs. 750. They said their condition has improved greatly only in the last few years. Earlier, no women were made permanent. There is still, however, a very large number of women employed as casual labour with the contractor. Like in the mines, there seemed to be a movement of voluntary retirement amongst the women. They said they wanted their sons to get employment now that they were growing old.

Other jobs involving women on the docks were iron scrap loading and sulphur loading. When the Commission met the iron scrap loaders, they found them handling the rough scrap with bare hands and feet, their legs exposed beneath their tucked up saris. They sat down to talk, and many hands and feet had old wounds and freshly bleeding cuts. A ship from Iran had dumped this scrap. They were unloading it from the dock into trucks. Twenty-three women load one truck, for which they receive Rs. 50—that is Rs. 2 per woman. It is not regular work. When there are many trucks, they can earn upto Rs. 10-12 in a long day. Other times, there is no work for ten days together. They come from Taluka Sami in district Mesana. A contractor based in Madiad brought them here. There are seven contractors engaging 500 women here through a large labour supply company.

Kokila, the more articulate amongst them, said that she and some other women have been coming here for the last eight years. They are landless weavers. Children are not allowed on the dock so they stay home in the slum. The Commission visited them. Their slum is in a very bad condition. Toilets exist only in name were filthy and unfunctioning.

Another group on the docks were loading sulphur powder into trucks. They all told the same story—not enough work. The air is thick with sulphur. There was a yellow cloud engulfing everyone while the Commission members and the loaders were talking. It was like standing in an acrid dust storm—the sulphur got into the mouth, eyes, nose, ears, skin, everywhere.

These women also work in groups. They have been earning Rs. 7/day for the last 7 years, when there is work. The Commission asked them where they left their children. "What children?" one asked. "Very few of us have had children since we started here. Because of this sulphur. It is 'garam' to the body. The dock Doctor has confirmed this to them. One Commission member noticed that her white cotton sari had turned completely yellow when they left. She said today, "Their wombs must look like this."

In the Pune meeting the Commission met the Hamal Panchayat, a union of hamal labourers who load and unload in the wholesale commodities market yards. Half of the members are women. They get up at 4 a.m. so they can begin work in the yards by 8.30. They work there till 7 or 8 p.m. They keep the yard swept, fill water, make tea, clean wheat, grains, pulses, coconut, and other produce. They collect samples and show them to the traders. It is a common yard for both industrial and agricultural products. They earn Rs. 4-5/day. They get to take some of the left over grains from the crevices of the floor and furniture. They have to respond to orders all the time. They do not get an official break during the day. There is no register to mark their presence, no wage slip, no fixed salary. Some seasons, they have to wait till 8 p.m. before they are excused. There is no shed or other facility for them to sit.

Sitabai has worked for 20 years in this yard, most of the time earning only Rs. 1-1.50. Her mother-in-law died under the pressure of bags of foodgrains which fell on her. The only compensation they gave was some firewood to cremate her. Sitabai's husband also works here as a handcart puller. She recently underwent a cataract operation, but got no medical support. Her divorced daughter also stays with her and works here. She said they used to be beaten and ill-treated. But now, because of the Hamal Panchayat, this has stopped. Instead of wages, they want a monthly salary of Rs. 600-700, and only 8 hours of work a day.

Another kind of service job which provides seasonal work to women is cottonpod shelling. Women in Gujarat do this work for about 4 months each year. Some work right at the cotton gins, others work in their villages. They go to the cotton gins to fetch the pods, often walking long distances. They carry the bundles home, and old and young women and the children all work at unshelling the pods. Then they carry back the shelled cotton, collect payment, and carry home another load. They earn Rs. 2.50 for 20 kg. One woman with all her helpers can earn upto Rs. 4.00 a day like this. Working in the gin, you earn Re 1 more, for sitting there from 7 a.m.—5 p.m. But many women prefer to carry the work home, because then they can watch the children and employ their labour as well. They use the shells for fuel. Some women also migrate from Udaipur to do this work in Gujarat.

In Coimbatore district, the Commission met Shivbhagya, a roof-thatcher. She stitches 80 leaves together and sells the entire thing for Rs. 10. Villagers buy them like this, readymade, or she will go to their houses and fix their damaged ones. Alone, it takes her one day. If her son (14) helps, they can complete one roof in half a day. They receive Rs. 4 for this service.

Other urban women who the Commission met were involved in food service work. One Madras woman, Padmavati, delivers lunchboxes to office workers from their homes. She has 10 customers, and she charges each Rs. 10/month. she carries them in a large basket on her head, and usually walks to save the transport charges of Rs. 1.60 by bus.

Bharani delivers milk from the booth to individual customers in Bombay. She charges Rs. 5/month per bottle. She earns Rs. 400-500 each month, for 7 hours of work a day. She loses about Rs. 50 each month to breakage and spillage. Her shoulders and back ache constantly from the heavy load she walks with.

In Pune, Kaushalyabai works in a community kitchen. It is part of a scheme to provide snacks and

lunches to workers for a reasonable price. She said hundreds of workers a day eat here, and the workers preparing the food and serving them now want a fixed salary.

An innovative project Rajamma took up in Hyderabad is a typing institute. She is an SSC failed who was working in an office for a private firm keeping accounts and typing. The firm closed down, so she got a loan from the Women's Development Corporation and opened this institute. She has bought eight typewriters. Thirty women and girls come for training. The house rent is Rs. 500/month, and her monthly loan repayment is Rs. 500. She said so far, there is no income left after paying these two expenses.

## FACTORY WORKERS

Ramilaben is a textile mill worker in Gujarat who attended the Commission's Ahmedabad meeting. She said that she is one of 200 women in her area who are contract labourers. They work "outside" the mills, though they are on the same premises. They enter their workplace through separate gates from the regular mill workers. She is doing the exact same operations which are being done in the mills—only she works under a contractor. She earns Rs. 5-8/day, without welfare benefits or job security, while women who work in the mill proper earn Rs. 30/day at the same jobs. She said that she and the other women under the contract system have joined all the unions operating in these mills, but none of them have taken up their problems. This is also the case with the Labour Department—their case has been pending there for seven years.

These kind of informal "factories" exist all over the country. The employer hires contractors to fill his labour needs, while keeping his official muster roll small, to avoid any of the formal responsibilities that legislation requires of him. He hires all the women on a piece rate basis which daily amounts to anywhere from 20-50% of the daily minimum wage in a particular area.

In a Karnataka hosiery factory in Belgaon, the tactics were to list fewer than ten workers to avoid legal obligations. The Commission saw many more workers than this, which did not even include all the homebased workers who did joining, buttonholing, pressing and labelling. No one received a bonus, provident funds, or a regular salary. Men earned higher than women. None of the management wanted to answer any of the Commission's questions.

The place where the biggest concentration of factory piece-rate workers is occurring is in Kandla Free Trade Zone. The Commission visited one garment factory where 2500 workers were employed to make fashion garments for export. 1800 of these employees were women. This Milton factory recruits their workers through Mahila Mandals and Panchayats. They then provide bus transportation for the workers, to and from their villages. It costs them an average of Rs. 7 per person per day. Girls are often trained in the Mahila Mandals in tailoring. If not, they undergo 3-4 months of training in the factory itself. Salaries, all on piece-rate workers can earn up to Rs. 700, if they work very hard. They get 19 per cent bonus, and provident fund.

At the Milton factory, young women were manufacturing blue jeans. The entire process is divided into 19 different operations, each performed by a separate operator. Kalpana, from Hachan village has been doing one stitching operation for five years, and earns Rs. 307/month. Rama is also from the same village, and after three years is earning Rs. 225. Ruksana irons 200 jeans daily in a large industrial presser for Rs. 280/month. Valli had come from Madras. Her husband was working in the Railways, so they were posted in Bachali village. She has worked here for four and a half years. She learned how to use the pressing machine in two days and has done that job ever since. She started at Rs. 260/month, and gets a 20 per cent increase each year, so she is now earning Rs. 320. Baijvati from Kukan is stitching on the most sophisticated sewing machine in the world. It took her 15 days to learn, after her training in the Mahila Mandal. She studied upto 10th standard, and there was no opportunity for her in her village. She makes Rs. 325/month. Many other girls were well below 18, though when asked, always replied "18". Many who answered "18" also said they had been working there 2, 3, or up to five years.

The management faces no labour problem. They suggested to the Commission that vocational training schools at the village level should be opened. "Then, if those students are found suitable, we will recruit them," they rationalized.

"Will you fund the school?" the Commission asked.

"What about the government, like the Social Welfare Department?" the manager asked. "This will solve your unemployment problem in rural areas," he added condescendingly.

At another factory in the Free Trade Zone, where flour-scent switch gears are manufactured, the Commission met 32 women doing the finer production work. They start at Rs. 8/day plus transport. After a year they are supposedly made permanent, but only 12 of the 250 workers here had achieved that status. Champa was not even getting the transportation benefit. They consider three miles distant too close to qualify, so she walks every day. Another woman there for 4 years was still temporary, getting Rs. 230/month. Both these women had been deserted by their husbands and were staying with their parents.

The Commission took up these issues with the Development Commissioner. Both the general public and the employers think the FTZ is a special exception, and that labour laws do not apply there. He agreed that this is a problem and said that notification for minimum wages is under way. He also added that this industry does provide good employment opportunities for a backward region like Kutch, defending their policy of not adhering to legislation, and not allowing workers to strike. When they had filed grievances and demands for creche, the employers simply escaped their responsibility by paying a fine of Rs. 50-100. Instead of taking the Commission's queries seriously, they moved on to proudly display the graphs showing financial progress and their contribution to the national economy. At the end they did promise to plan welfare activities for the workers.

At a match factory in Quilon, Kerala, the Commission saw women making bundles of match boxes. Most of them were 16-17 years old, earning Rs. 10/day. Men earned Rs. 15. Women also operate the machines which produce the cut match sticks. They earn 17 paise per gross of sticks. They can cut 50 gross/day, earning about Rs. 8.50. Men prepare the solution phosphorous, and women dip the match sticks. It affects their throats, they said, and they regularly have to take medicines for it. The management complained that in the neighbouring states, minimum wages are not paid, like they are here, and this makes it very difficult to compete with them.

At a Kerala State Cashew Corporation Ltd. factory near to the match factory, the Commission met 350 women working at shelling, peeling, grading and packaging cashews. This is one of 34 factories under this corporation.

About 200 women were working in a large, poorly lit room, squatting on a small plank and sharply tapping the cashew nuts with a heavy stick, and quickly shelling them. The room was filled with the constant tapping of their tools. They get Rs. 9/day, plus 76 paise for each kg. they shell. It generally comes to Rs. 15/day. Sumati has been doing this work for 16 years. She starts at 6 a.m. each day, and earns Rs. 40-45/week for 4-5 months a year. She is not getting benefits of ESIS because she is working in this 'seasonal' industry.

A different group of women is involved in peeling the thin skin off the nuts and grading them according to size and quality. They earn about Rs. 14/day on piece rate, but this work is available for only two or three days a week during the five month season. These workers also complained that they wanted ESIS benefits, regular work, and finger caps, to protect their hands from the fluid of the nut.

In Jammu and Kashmir the Commission visited the Ganderbal Industrial Training Institute, where a soap factory was being run by the Central Social Welfare Board. Even young women from farmers' families were working there. They were manufacturing and packing Sunlight Soap for Hindustan Lever Co., which supplies the raw-materials, machinery, and packaging materials. The CSWB financed the workshop. Women earn Rs. 230/month, and their capable manager, Sarla, gets Rs. 420. They are not yet keen on producing their own raw materials, which is the ultimate goal of the project, so they can be an independent manufacturing unit.

At Jammu the Commission visited the Chinar Biscuit Factory. 350 workers are employed there, 100 of them are women. They are operating the machines, packaging, headloading and cleaning. All the supervisors were men. These women liked working here because there are regular hours, and the working conditions are pleasant and hygienic. They earn Rs. 11.50/day one month of leave a year, and one month of maternity leave. The women said they want creche facilities. The manager disagreed by saying, "I offered them creche facilities, but they said they preferred to keep their children at home" Their main priority is a stable monthly salary.



Two women in the Bombay slum meeting told the Commission about their jobs as leather workers. They daily go to a workshed run by a contractor for eight hours of stitching chappals. They join the strap to the sole. These are of cheap quality. The women are paid Rs. 10/day. They suffer pain in their fingers and palms for this work. There are not any facilities for them in the shed. The chappals are supplied to some factory which the women do not know.

Another factory job women from this slum are involved in is cleaning empty oil cans in godowns. In one godown, eight women are working together every day. They have to clean 1200 cans a day (about 150 per woman). They earn Rs. 18/day and suffer burned hands from the caustic soda they use for the work. Komal said she has to take her four children to the godown with her because there is no one to look after them at home.

## GENERAL ISSUES

During the Commission's tour, we saw women working in their workplaces. We talked with them in meetings and sat with them in their homes to learn about their problems. We tried to listen attentively to each woman's words, to understand her thoughts and feelings. We found that these women are very busy people—busy generating income, and busy saving on expense, because any money saved is money gained. Her sole purpose is to protect her family from hunger and to enable them to survive their poverty.

We witnessed over and over again that the work of millions of such women is not recognized as "work", either by her or by the society. Our over-riding impression was that these women's work brought very little income to them. They have nothing that can be called their own except their children about whom each woman goes on saying, "my own". These women have no other assets.

## PERFORMANCE OF LAWS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMMES

The Government of India, no doubt, is conscious of the conditions existing amongst these women. To improve their status, laws have been enacted, policies formulated, programmes established and funds allocated. The Constitution of India upholds our ideals that these women should have equality and justice. Laws like the Minimum Wages Act are meant to ensure women their due return for the labour they put in. The Equal Remuneration Act is meant to equalize women's and men's payment for similar work. The contract Labour Act was passed to remove the exploitation of middlemen. These are just a few of many such protective legislations enacted to help these workers. Social security schemes, supportive health policies and innumerable anti-poverty programmes like IRDP, TRYSEM, DWACRA, and the like at certain targets to uplift women from poverty. These programmes reach out to uplift women who are workers in the unorganized sector. They are often extremely poor, and they are women, so their vulnerability is great.

This Commission was established to observe how this "uplift" is progressing on a national scale. The following is what we witnessed during the Commission's tour regarding the performance of these laws, policies, and programmes aimed at women.

## EQUAL REMUNERATION

Virtually nowhere did we find equal wages being paid to men and women for the same work—not in any occupation. Even in States where women's status is not that low, like Nagaland, Manipur, and Assam, women do not receive equal wages. It is not only private employers who practise this discrimination. Co-ops are also at fault. Even when the Government is the employer, the payment to women is less than to men for the same work. The dimly few exceptions to this rule were found in Himachal Pradesh. As many times as we probed, as many times, as we witnessed women doing the exactly the same labour and putting in the same hours as men, nowhere were we given any satisfactory answer as to why they are being paid less.

## MINIMUM WAGES

We found employers paying attention to the Minimum Wages Act only long enough to discover all the wages they can avoid implementing it. Only in Kerala and a few places like Nipani where strong

unions exist, is this Act in effect. Even bodies serving the poorest, like KVIC fail to provide minimum wages, as ardently reported by tassar reeler in Bihar.

The Famine Relief Programme proved to be one of the biggest defaulters. In Gujarat, not only do they waive legal wages and give a fraction of the minimum, but even regular work is being transferred to Famine Relief Work, so that payment to workers can be lowered. Many workers continue in the same jobs they have done for months or years, at half their former salary, because now it is "Famine Relief". As 60% of the workers on these sites are women, they are affected the most. We could not understand how anything less than the Minimum wage could be justified. At Famine Relief worksites in Rajasthan, we saw that the workers were not paid in cash at all only in foodgrains. For cash, they are forced to sell food grains.

In the numerous economic activities we observed, that most occupations are not covered under the state schedule of minimum wages. For example, garment makers, papad rollers, block printers, loaders and unloaders, domestic servants, and innumerable others have no fixation of minimum wage. We encountered many local groups working to combat their exploitation by demanding fixation of minimum wages and other kinds of protection. The domestic workers in Pune and Bangalore, garment workers in Gujarat, fishnet makers in Kerala, and silk reeler in Bihar are a few of those involved in this struggle. The others, who are still too vulnerable to demand any change, are too many to mention.

A clever observation applying across the country was that wherever we found women working in the unorganized sector at occupations which were covered by Minimum Wage legislation the workers had all been switched by their employer to a piece rate basis.

In Maharashtra, women made a very astute suggestion. They said that the minimum wages for homebased workers should be higher than the factory workers, as the former have to use their own space, light, utilities, and equipment, while factory workers do not incur these additional expenses. "Why should the employers be subsidized by the home workers?" They asked, "Homebased work should be made costlier than factory work for the employer, then let him choose between the two."

## SOCIAL SECURITY

Whether women are working in occupations where social security legislation exists or does not exist, the benefits are virtually zero. Maternity benefits, creches at the worksites, medicare, accident compensation or even occupational safety measures are simply unheard of. We could not differentiate the workers in the formal sector from those of the informal sector in terms of their contribution to the economy. Yet, social security schemes are non-existent or, if existing, insignificant, ill-conceived, delayed or simply not implemented for the unorganized sector women. Into this category fit examples like the old age pension scheme in U.P. and Tamil Nadu the widowhood pension in Bihar and Kerala, and the maternity benefits for agricultural workers in Gujarat. Neither the Employment Guarantee Schemes or the Famine Relief Works have provided the legally required creche facilities. And Municipal employees working as sweepers have been kept on daily wages and granted none of the benefits granted to all the other employees. After 16 years of sweeping work in the Gandhidham Municipality or 32 years in Jammu, women are still only daily wage workers.

Because bidi workers are now almost completely shifted to home based contract system employment, they too are being denied social security benefits. They are paid entirely on piece rate, or under an "innovative" new system of "sale-purchase" whereby the principal employer can never be legally pinpointed. His guile is supreme. Despite the two good, clear pieces of legislation to protect wages, working conditions, and social security benefits—with inspectorate machinery under the state labour department—the employer's exploitation is still pervasive. The simplest measures, like Identity cards, have not even been made for most workers. Scholarships for workers' children and medicare are vague dreams to most workers. The Government encourages bidi workers cooperatives to combat these problems, yet refused to market their products. Such half-hearted attempts hardly serve the purpose.

The standard reply when the Commission probed into the lack of social security or minimum wage was: "The Labour Department has not received any such complaints Madam". Do we wait till the complaint is received? Will these women ever be strong enough to complain and risk losing their work?

This is the climax of insensitivity and inaction on the part of the Government. It is equally unfortunate to say that when the Government is the employer, it is also a serious defaulter in implementing these laws.

## **WORKERS' EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

This Labour Ministry programme is not reaching women workers in the unorganized sector, except for some bidi workers in M.P., Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Those engaged in home-based occupations like gathering forest produce or raising livestock, or doing domestic work in others' houses, etc. are not yet perceived as "workers", and thus not eligible for the programme. This problem of perception on the part of the policy makers towards the unorganized sector, and towards women in general exists at every other level down the line.

## **WOMEN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

Only a few states have established Women's Corporation. Although this Corporation was established for economic uplift of women, it is not satisfactorily reaching out to poor women and helping them to develop their productivity or income, or lending them support in eradicating middlemen, contractors, or money-lenders. Nor has the Corporation taken up the cause of women's displacement from work with the government, or rehabilitated the displaced ones in alternative employment.

## **WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION**

Women's representation at every level except that of the worker is largely absent. It is a serious omission in policy when women are not included in democratic bodies like cooperatives. Requisites like ownership of a loom to be eligible for representation in weavers' cooperative eliminates women members in 90% of the cases. In many states, men traditionally sit at the loom, so ownership is considered to be theirs. This policy does not give any credit to women's arduous and skilled preweaving preparation work which is integral to weaver's work. Similar problems exist in the Dairy and Fishery cooperatives. Even when no assets are involved, like in Handicrafts Cooperatives, women are still not taken as members. The integrated nature of men's and women's work is not represented in non-integrated cooperatives.

Another place where segregation blocks women's participation is at local government levels. In most states, a statute requires one or two women to be on the village panchayat. We searched out these members in the majority of locations we visited, and were extremely disappointed to find them as either non-existent, or practically non-participatory members.

In a State like H.P. where Mahila Mandals are strong and vocal women want the Mahila Mandals, to have authority equal to the Panchayat, because they feel that they are more knowledgeable about women's issues.

In other states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra even separate state Boards like those of Mathadi workers or Construction workers suffer from lack of women's representation. Hence women are now demanding that new Boards have an equal percentage of women board members as the percentage of women workers in that occupation. For example, women domestic workers and women construction workers often make up more than half the labourers in these occupations, and they want their numbers reflected in the Boards.

The few niches that women have carved out for themselves as government functionaries, teachers, work supervisors, field workers, health workers, and extension workers-moving about in twos or threes in rural areas, meeting in the homes of village women and helping them to look after their children helping them acquire better health and employment opportunities these are the examples that need to be multiplied through all levels of policy. These women make good impressions on rural women. Usually, the District Collectors are appreciative and supportive of their work. They are appreciated in the communities where they work, and are not perceived as "Sarkari".

## **WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT**

The common working women's perception of government is through police, forest guards, and court or family planning functionaries. She does not think of the 'Sarkar' as a friend or protector of the weak. No one has seen a Labour Inspector in their village or mohulla. Forest authorities are generally

harsh to the local population, generating hostility between the two groups. Beating and harassment from the authorities are deeply internalized by the women. The Forest Development Corporation's major purpose of providing fair prices for forest products and eliminating middlemen has not been realized.

## ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMMES

We found that the directive to reach at least 30% women beneficiaries has initiated efforts to reach out to women though this target is not yet being met. Women's record in loan repayment has been commendable in many states, and has given officials confidence to pursue the measure. Voluntary Agencies issuing loans have also experienced positive results. Some innovative coordination of various government departments, like in the Baster (M.P.) Sericulture Project, have created well-balanced, integrated programmes.

DWACRA groups of West Bengal have been successful in helping women produce quality products and find local markets. In Punjab, the Women's Economic Development Corporation has been linked with DWACRA to successfully secure markets through government contracts.

In Orissa, one District Collector helped tribals get loans by providing them a guarantee through collective land ownership. A senior government official there seriously suggested giving assets in the name of women, as they are more dependable. All industrial units in Orissa which are taking loans have to compulsorily recruit 10% women for employment.

West Bengal has a directive stating that if any cooperative is not registered within 3 months, the group can go to the Tribunal. The effectiveness of the directive is exposed in the complaint of a broom cooperative which in spite of dharnas for three years, is still unregistered. Out of 280 registered women's cooperatives, 163 are lying defunct. This requires serious consideration—what is ailing in cooperative policy towards women?

The major problem of IRDP are that women are not being considered eligible for loans because their husbands have defaulted with the bank. The problems that caused him to default are often the same problems that cause him to default in supporting his family (i.e. illness, alcoholism, etc.) and are the very reason the woman needs a loan to support the family herself. There still prevails the attitude that women are not economic contributors, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Innumerable times we also heard that "because we have no house or assets, we were not granted the loan".

In Manipur, women were unhappy with the village Pradhan's selection of beneficiaries for IRDP loans. The women were demanding the selection process be granted to the Mahila Mandals jurisdiction. Their other policy suggestions were similar to those heard in Unhrul, Assam—that the banks' policy to not lend outside a 16 km radius should be changed in the cases of hilly areas. Women in HP suggested uplifting the poverty line in hilly areas, as their cost of living is higher, and this line affects their ability to get loans.

We heard numerous accounts of TRYSEM projects where there has been no follow up. They have been giving very limited, stereotyped training to women, like in tailoring and knitting, with no tie-up either to raw-material supply at the front end, or marketing at the back. They have had no co-ordination with other departments which could lend useful technical advice. Receiving training in skills whose market is beyond the women's own control has not been useful, but frustrating. Training in upgrading women's existing skills seems to have been the most successful. Rural women everywhere complained that they could not go to the bank three or four times just to acquire the loans.

Positive examples were found in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka where the governments are engaging women in sericulture projects, and developing their skills through effective extension work. In Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, the government recognizes rural women's extensive contribution to dairying. Besides, promoting women's dairy cooperatives in a big way, they have helped them manifest successfully by providing the necessary infrastructural facilities. In all these cases, women took good advantage of everything the programmes offered them.

## INDUSTRIALIZATION

Mechanization has played havoc with many women's occupations and lives. Women working in

mines, tobacco processing, agriculture, and docks have been displaced by conveyor belts and other automatic machinery. Industrialization eats up both their agricultural lands, and their work places. Cement factories in U.P. and H.P. and zinc factories in Rajasthan have ruined agricultural land and labour opportunities. Industrial farming in Punjab has largely displaced women's agricultural labour. Certain government laws and policies promoting industrialization, modernization and voluntary retirement have been detrimental to women's employment. It often reduces them to contract labourers, below any legislative protection. Other women have found their jobs displaced by machines being operated only by men.

Women also have the intelligence and desire to progress into these jobs. In Himachal Pradesh women requested tractors which would be suitable to hilly farming. The extensive milk markets for dairy women would not be possible without infrastructural facilities. Many women now contributed technical and scientific skills to sustain these operations. And how delighted we were to meet the 143 tribal women in Kaliapani mines in Orissa, having regular jobs with Rs. 600/month salaries wearing their helmets and boots, and commuting on bicycles from the village to the mines, every day.

## ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Despite the fact that women work with land, cattle, looms, fish, textiles etc. they are seldom the owners of these resources. For many women in the unorganized sector, there are other valuable resources which they also have very limited access to: market space, work space, licences, training, and markets and for their products—all things which would improve their economic future. Then there are the daily necessities to which many Indian women devote major portions of their time and energy acquiring—fuel, fodder, food and water. This section will summarize our observations regarding women's access to these kinds of resources.

### LAND

Land is rarely in women's names. Only in the case of widows, usually with no sons, is it listed under her name, and she can only rarely, with great difficulty, retail it in her name. In West Bengal's recent land reforms, like Operation Burga, share-croppers registered for land ownership are always men, despite the fact that women have also devoted their entire lives to cultivating and nurturing this land. In Andhra Pradesh, landless women struggling for their rights under the Bonded Labour Act tell similar stories, with added lists of atrocities inflicted on them and their families for even attempting to assert their legal right.

Wherever collective tribal lands are being privatised women are losing status because they are being registered under the men's names. Previously, all tribal members were considered and landholders—women and men.

### WATER

Drinking water crises in dry and drought prone areas, or hill areas have the worst impact on women's economic and personal lives. Walking 3-4 kms. to fetch water is common. In Jodhpur district, Karikhurd village was a heart-rending example. Because of the prolonged drought, the Harijan well was completely dry, and the other well had only a puddle in a small depression at the bottom. When we arrived there, women were balancing on the narrow stone tip of the well, throwing their small tins attached by strings down into the puddle. All their strings became entangled, and arguments broke out in their competition for this scarce resource. When each woman drew out her makeshift tin, she would empty it into her waiting vessel, spilling some on to her skirt. After many refills, she would then wring her skirt into the vessel as well. Harijans were at the mercy of the higher caste women to empty one or two of their precious tins into their vessels. They could not draw the water themselves, because, as they said, "If we pollute well, we may be cursed by God." Many women had fresh injuries and bandages from their physical fights over the water, and the month before our visit, one pregnant woman had fallen into the well and been killed. (Despite the severity of their crisis, they overwhelmed us by offering each of us a big glass of sweet red coloured water, fresh flowers and songs!).

Subhadra of Sirmour spends the entire day fetching water for her family of thirteen. They require

130 buckets a day. Even Kerala is experiencing water scarcity this year. Bombay slum women asserted that water is often the cause of local riots. And some Punjabi women told of their difficulties now that their local water supply has been diverted to a military cantonment.

## FUEL AND FODDER

This resource is the source of constant worry due to constant retreat of the forest from every pocket of the country. Despite women having to walk as far as 20 kms. in Rajasthan for fuelwood, the men do not help the women in this task. U.P. Garhwal women also complained that deforestation was forcing them to walk further and further each year.

For want of fodder, women taking IRDP loans for cattle and dairy projects often suffer—especially the landless women, or those experiencing the scarcity of drought times. Women have invariably responded positively to programmes, which help them like plant fuel wood, fodder, fruit bamboo, and mahua trees or making smokeless chullahs.

## TOILETS

Village plots reserved for toilets are getting smaller and smaller, usurped for other purposes, or filled up. This forces women to line up in the dark, along roadsides, to relieve themselves. This is the most acute problem for urban slum women or people living in resettlement colonies. If there are toilets, they are characterized by interminable queues, no doors, and filth. If there are no toilets or they are no longer functional, the entire colony is pervaded with the stench, and heavy tolls are exacted of the resident children's health. Men can relieve themselves when out or at work, but because many women work at home, they suffer more. As one Bombay slum woman said, "Forget the house, just give me a toilet of my own." Bathing place is another necessity, which when lacking, creates many unspoken tensions amongst residents.

## SPACE

For homebased workers, space is an urgent need. Scrap collectors, furniture makers, and weavers need space to process their goods. Vendors need market or street space, preferably in a consistent location, so they can build up a clientele. Big cities and downtown markets have been consistently removing hawkers from the marketplaces and roads, where their "encroachment" hinders the smooth flow of traffic. City planners and market architects have not taken into account the thousands of existing vendors in the city. They cry for 'two baskets worth' of space, nothing else. We heard this cry ardently from vegetable, fruit flower, egg, and fish-vending women in every city we visited. The Imphal Women's Market is an ideal model for other cities in the country. It is the last one which is properly maintained.

Because all slums are work centres where people are busy producing, processing and storing raw materials and finished goods to earn some income, slum dwellers are incredibly vulnerable to eviction. Not only do they lose their homes when this happens. They lose all their capital, and also their workplace. Without a workplace they cannot dry papad, or blockprint in Bombay, they cannot spread cloth to do chikan embroidery in Lucknow, crochet lace in Bhagalpur, stitch garments in Ahmedabad, weave a shawl in Hyderabad, vend firewood in Madras, run a cane shop in Bangalore. For lack of workspace, banks do not trust their stability enough to grant loans.

## RAW MATERIALS

We observed that for artisans producing utility items like brooms and baskets, small furniture, quilts, iron utensils garments, woven products, pottery, shoes and food items—their main problem is availability of raw material, and the price of it. They have no problem marketing their products (if they get space), if they had an assured supply of their required raw materials, at a reasonable and fixed price, they would need nothing else. Their recurring demand to us was for a policy that ensures them the first claim to the raw material from the source, of those who are the actual producers. An additional suggestion was that yarn should be supplied to weavers from the local ration shops, at cheaper prices. In Gujarat we saw that the State Textile Corporation had assured the supply of chindi and cut pieces to

women's cooperatives at a fixed, low price. That policy has helped the actual stitchers to eliminate middleman agents at the procurement level, increasing their profit margin.

## MARKET

Craftswomen who produce decorative items find difficulty marketing their goods directly to the consumers. Also, ill-conceived projects of voluntary agencies, DWACRA groups, and Mahila Mandals have faced problems of marketing their goods, and have surplus goods stocking up. The Government of Gujarat has a commendable Resolution which has helped strengthen many small women's groups and coops. If there is a women's organization providing goods or services, the resolution requires the government to buy from the women's group without taking any tender. This has created greater employment opportunities for many women.

In many places, women have demanded special or separate markets to help fight discrimination, intimation, and injustice, e.g. tie and dye women of Jodhpur, and bidi women in Tamil Nadu. Women in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have demanded sheds in industrial estates at affordable rent.

## CREDIT

All over, both the rural and urban working women whom we met, suffered from lack of access to credit. Their need is very small. Clara of Bangalore needs Rs. 35 to double her income, or an idli vendor requested Rs. 150 to be able to store her supplies. The interest that slum women pay is simply unthinkable—from 2% per day to 20% per day. In Tamil Nadu, the price of a loan in emergency is pawning a child's labour. Most of the rural poor do not know that no guarantee is needed for them to acquire a loan. Unmarried daughters are not granted loans by banks. In general banks hesitate to lend to women, despite the evidence that in most cases women have proved themselves good repayers. There is also little encouragement coming from banks for women to open deposit accounts. Voluntary organizations involved in women's savings have recognised women as good savers. And most of all, credit is a major resource that helps women to develop self-reliance and more effective ways to contribute to the economy.

## LICENSING

We learned that women actually need licences to pick rags. Despite our surprise, vendors and hawkers all want these licences, for some security in their own regular place, and for when they travel outside to village heats. They are ready to pay licence fees for such a security. Without this kind of identification/legitimation, they get endless harassment for bribes.

## IDENTITY CARDS

For homebased workers, the equivalent to licences for hawkers are identity cards. These both establish their "worker" status and entitle them to their legal security in times of need. Homebased workers in every state made demands for identity cards issued in their own names.

## TRANSPORT

Fish vendors are in urgent need of reliable transport facilities as they are continually losing their market to frozen fish vendors. Vegetable growers, or hawkers who sell in the city markets also need public transport which they are entitled to use.

## HOUSING

Indira Awas Yojna has been well received by the poor, but once again, it is not granted in women's names. In Rajasthan, we met a woman who was driven out from her house, which was in her husband's name. She had been the sole supporter of the family for many years while he was ill and unemployed. To combat this kind of injustice, a voluntary organization in Orissa recommended that "all government assets should be given in the first name of the women, as women are more steady in employment, and usually stay in the village."

In the Bangalore and Madras slums, women were allotted plots of land for housing, but they were



too poor to invest in the housing (Rs. 9,000). Hence they are often compelled to succumb to the pressure from others for benami sale.

## **CRECHE**

Women have so greatly internalized the care of their children as their absolute responsibility, they have not come forward to demand the creche service as their legal right. Also they are not confident of the quality of care such a service could provide. Hence, no very articulate demands have formed around this issue, despite the intensity of their need. The issue of feeling that their own children were neglected was topmost in all the domestic workers' minds. For women like these, even so small a service as the midday meal at school is to be greatly appreciated, and affords her some mental relief while she is away from her children all day.

On Famine Relief and Employment Guarantee Scheme Worksites 50%-60% of the workers are young, able-bodied women who have infants and children. Many of them are brought to worksite, where there is not even a shed to put them in. Despite the Scarcity Relief Code which provides that a shed, drinking water, and creche be available for workers, none existed on the worksites that we visited in Rajasthan, Gujarat or Maharashtra. Nor did we see creches in biscuit factories in Jammu, in the cashew factories in Kerala, in the Free Trade zone in Gujarat, in the Tobacco Processing Factory in Nipani, or in the bidi factory in Ahmednagar. As long as women remain torn between needing to provide for their children, and having to neglect them for their job, they will have little chance of developing as whole, confident mothers and workers.

## **RATION CARD**

The Public Distribution System was working in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Punjab, where women in every meeting had and used ration cards. Elsewhere, the picture was bleaker. Migrant labourers had no ration cards. They had to buy supplies from the outside shops, where "each time the wages rise, the price of rations immediately rises too." In the West Bengal, meeting of 60 forest produce collectors whose average income was Rs. 15/week, only one woman held a ration card. In Orissa, where 160 rural women met in Ganjam district, only 18 had cards. In Uttarkhand village, U.P., none had cards. Some who had previously had them, had pawned them for Rs. 20 to the ration shop or the grocer, and had not been able to recover them.

## **BETTER TOOLS**

We saw women using primitive tools to carve out their living. And all of them are ready to learn to use any new tool that would increase their productivity and income, but most do not know how to go about acquiring such tools and skills. They need to have their skill and equipment upgraded according to their own capacity and circumstances. They appreciate technology like smokeless chullahs, and handpumps, and grain processors. Better tools does not mean they need power based equipment—just sharper knives and awls to help them cut their leather and stitch their shoes. Or affordable tables to do their printing and embroidery work on.

Women's right to employment, to income, and to assets must be recognized to help them move ahead. Access to assets, to any tool or any resource that will help bring them into the mainstream, and into our visibility is a must.

## **WOMEN'S AWARENESS**

During our Commission tours, we spent a good deal of time questioning women about their awareness levels. We were interested in their literacy rate, and what their attitudes to education were—both for themselves and their daughters. We were always curious which government programmes they were aware of. We questioned them about their communication networks—how did they get important news or information who read newspapers, or saw television, or what kind of programmes did they listen to on the radio. And finally, what were their perceptions—about these programmes, and about themselves, as women and workers, in relation to these issues?

Women's literacy level was very low amongst the women we met in Rajasthan. In meetings with 215 women there, only four were literate. They said frankly, "We do not want to send our daughters to

school after 1st standard, because they need to be trained in work." They were interested in further training to upgrade their skills, but only if it was offered in their own villages. Most of them showed preference for work outside home. In one of these meetings where 40 women were present, none of them read newspapers or listened to the radio, except to an occasional play at night. "Our sons bring important news to us," they told us. In another large meeting of 250 women, 25 of them listened to radios, and 25% sent their daughters to school. Only one read news. The rural women did not know about the minimum wage rate or anything about equal remuneration admissible to them as workers. The tie and dye women at these meetings were aware of the sources of their raw materials, and the market, but they have no capital of their own. Leather and aritari women are aware both of the market price, and thus, of their own exploitation, but they also feel powerless due to not having working capital.

In Ukhrul, Manipur, of the 70 women we met, six were literate, and only two or three knew about IRDP and TRYSEM. They all knew about their District Autonomous Council there and how it functioned. In Imphal, 67 of 70 knew how to read and write, and all of them there were aware of IRDP and TRYSEM—in fact, they complained of the corruption and delay in these programmes.

Though almost half of the women we met in Nagaland were literate, they were not aware of IRDP and TRYSEM. They did not know about loans, laws, or the scholarships specially available to them to study anywhere in India. They had no exposure to training of any kind. Only very few read newspapers, and none had access to radios or TVs. They generally lacked communication with other areas.

We held six different meetings with women in Assam. We learned that about three-fourth of them were literate, and one-fourth of them knew about TRYSEM and IRDP. Some of the women present had learned account keeping and management skills following their TRYSEM training, but they complained that more of these programme funds are spent at the district level than at the village level. Half of the Assam women we met sent their daughters to school. Here again, very few read newspapers, or listen to the radio.

Of the tribal women in Bastar, only 8 of the 300 women we met were literate. They had no contact with newspapers, radio or television. They were aware of TRYSEM and IRDP, because they were involved in these programmes. "Our 'Mukhia' brings important news to the men. They pass it to our sons, who tell us," some women told us.

Of the 135 bidi workers, we met in the Jabalpur district 9 were literate. They also had no contact with media. Though they were not aware of Labour laws or of government loans, they were aware of their exploitation.

In Himachal Pradesh, almost half the women we met and questioned told us they were simple literates. Another 20% were educated up to 5th standard. Almost all of them send their daughters to school. They were all aware of IRDP and TRYSEM and ready to take training. There is no local daily newspaper. The one local monthly does not have a women's page. There is one weekly radio programme for women, but their TV is only relay. They wanted local programmes. Half of the women said they had no time for TV and radio, but 25% of them said they liked reading the stories in the Hindi paper. They were not aware of their legal rights, but almost a quarter of the women we met said they were interested in politics, elections and news.

In one meeting near Cochin, where 60% of the women were illiterate, they told us that they do send their daughters to school. In another meeting the education is very costly, they have to pay Rs. 30 per child per month. While bidi workers working in group, we saw one of them loudly reading out newspaper to them, her wage being paid by the group.

Of the bidi workers whom we met in Maharashtra, all were illiterate. They were not aware of minimum wages or any of the Acts. In Ahmednagar, they complained of corrupt bidi officials. In Jamkhed where a women's organization is functioning effectively they had much greater awareness gained through their weekly meeting. Here they share their experiences, discuss problems and social issues, organize demonstrations, and distribute posters. In other places we met women who were aware of IRDP and TRYSEM, wanted training under TRYSEM for better agriculture and veterinary services and some wanted training to be Balwadi teachers. In Dharavi slum in Bombay, more than half of the women who attended our meetings were literate. 12% read newspapers, 18% saw TV—preferring programmes on workers, women, and serial films. They mostly receive important

information through their neighbours and husbands. These women were aware of both bank loans and unions.

We also met women in the Bangalore slum. Half of them were literate, and half sent their daughters to school. Rural women in Karnataka also showed 50% literacy rates in our meetings but none of them had contact with any media. Their neighbours bring them the news. Some were aware of IRDP, but none knew about TRYSEM.

In the large Patna meeting, most of the women we met were illiterate. In rural areas in Bihar, most of those we met had never received any education.

However, they emphatically expressed their need to us for training in veterinary services, cattle care and cooperatives. The Women's Dairy Cooperative of Patna Distt. wanted a Mahila Bank.

In Tamil Nadu, the majority of the women at our meetings were literate, and half read newspapers. They said they like to read politics, and current events—like news on the Sri Lankan situation or on Sati. All of them were aware of the current sati issues. They complained that many things women think or want are not documented in the mass media. In the Madras meeting, these women were contract labourers, were aware of exploitative labour practices and existing labour legislation, because they were unionised. All of them wanted to take training to upgrade their skills in building construction.

Amongst the nine workers, in West Bengal, all of them were literate and all were members of a union, though they knew nothing about union activities. Their union subscription fee is deducted directly from their wages. Amongst the 72 forest workers met in West Bengal, only 3 were literate, and all sent their children to school. Only 8 of them knew about IRDP, and none had even seen TV. In one meeting, a potter's-wife said she "would never sit at the potter's wheel, because it is improper for women to do so". All the other women present there, agreed with her view.

In Orissa many of the women had radios, and liked songs and plays, but not the news. They especially liked radio plays in Oriya. There was a Mahila Mandal in one of the villages where we met, but of the 160 women at that meeting, none were members, 10 of these women were literate and a few of them were aware of the IRDP.

In our rural visits in the Punjab, very few of women we met were literate. About 10% said they listen to the radio but only a couple actually reads news. Nonetheless they all said they were interested in news and economic information. They were aware of politics, and of the migrant labour in the State and its effects on their job opportunities. Most of their sons are educated. Sixteen percent had received some TRYSEM training, and most of them were aware of IRDP.

In Gujarat, less than half of the women we met were literate. Yet all of them listened to the radio. They liked women's programmes and information on starting small businesses. Almost half of them saw TV and liked all the programmes, except the local ones.

Amongst the 35 stone crushers, we met in Banda highway, none were literate, only 2 listened to the radio—to songs. They did not understand the news or discussion programmes. None of them vote as they are not on the voter's list. Their daughters help in their work, from very young ages. At Garam Pani, none of the women we met were aware of TRYSEM or any other development schemes.

In Andhra Pradesh, a little more than half of the women who attended our meeting were illiterate. The vendors present told us they came to know of important news from their customers—"Important news flow in the air in the market." 25% listen to radios, but only a few see TV. Half of the women send their daughters to school—20% of them go to the school in their own village, and 30% go out to a neighbouring village for school.

In one meeting of 100 women in Kashmir while only 25 said they know how to read and write, all 100 said they read (read to by someone) the *Srinagar Times* in Urdu. In Kashmir, Achbal meeting, all of the women present listen to the radio—to news, politics, and other matters. Most of them also listen to news on Radio Pakistan. 11 of them were aware of IRDP and TRYSEM. While only 11 of their girls go to school, 150 of their boys attend. They said if there is a conflict between statements on radio and TV, they think that TV was the more reliable source.

## CONTRIBUTION TO FAMILY INCOME

During our public hearings, we frequently heard women saying, "There is no one else in my family

who is earning." Thus we made it our practice to ask women in each meeting to raise their hands if they were the sole supporters of their families. We know, the responses received in such meeting are annexed, they are subjective numbers and cannot be generalised, they reveal a great deal about these women's, economic status, and are worth reporting here.

The answer to this question of who was a 'sole supporter' was drawn very carefully, and as the tour went on, we began to realize the significance of the answer. We observed that the poorer the family, the higher the incidence of women being the sole supporters. According to our information we found in the South, women sole supporters were comparatively greater in number. These women reported that their men were unemployed, ill, depressed alcoholic, working outside and not sending money to them, or simply not contributing any income. Those without men told stories of abandonment, widowhood, or being mothers without being married.

We tried to gather information about the number of women contributing 50% or more of their family's income, but it was too complicated a concept to explain or to calculate. As such, 'income' itself is a very difficult and complicated concept to convey.

It has been amazing that women, even in the most critical time of drought or crop failure, did find small ways to earn income. They are constantly gathering dung or wood for fuel, stitching, clothing and bedding, taking on domestic work in other households, stringing cots, fetching water, etc. to earn what they need, while men are earning only when they have a 'proper' job.

## REPRESENTATION

At every stop on our tour, we tried to discover at what levels women were represented in the society. We tried to meet women in the village Panchayats, but mostly they did not exist. In the village level cooperatives of artisans, weavers, dairy producers, and fisheries, women were also mostly absent. Either they were not included in the membership, or they were listed simply for the namesake—the named women did not even know they were members. Where women were members, they hardly ever participated in general body meetings. The common answer from the officials of cooperatives was, "There is no bar on their attendance, they just are not interested." i.e. there has been no active extension by these societies to absorb women into their active folds.

Where women were found in cooperatives was where there were separate women's societies—in dairy, bidi work and savings and credit co-ops. They all faced problems, and only a few were economically successful, but these women were gaining experience to help them deal with obstacles and articulate their difficulties.

Women members in trade unions are still a rare event in a few locations, exceptional cases of unions of bonded labourers, bidi workers, construction workers, and domestic workers are found. In the separate women's unions, we found active women cadre. In mixed unions, except for one or two educated women leaders, a women's cadre was missing.

Mahila Mandals, Mahila Samitis, Mothers' Club, Mahila Sangams, and Stri Sangathans have been widely spread through the states, and women work at every level of these organizations.

These groups have been instrumental in affecting local change. In Nagaland, the Mothers' Clubs have mobilized to stop liquor vending and drug smuggling. In one area, they successfully lowered the number of liquor stalls from 180 to 30. They have also organized against the military abuse to their families during the insurgencies in their area.

Himachal Pradesh Mahila Mandals are also actively addressing issues of alcoholism in their communities. They also take up cases of family quarrels for conciliation.

Manipur women are traditionally effective organizers in their communities. The current living example is their resistance to a modern super market being constructed in place of the city's 100 year old women's market. These women still do not have any seats in the District Autonomous Council, but they have articulated their demand to get the power of selecting women beneficiaries for IRDP loan into the hands of their Mahila Mandals.

Assam's Mahila Samitis, based on economic activities of weaving and agriculture, have become inspiring examples to such groups in other parts of the country. They still have not successfully integrated other development programmes into their framework, however.

Madhya Pradesh has recently seen the emergence of 108 new Mahila Mandals. They all have buildings of their own, with government support. Though the grant is small, they are welcoming these centres.

In Maharashtra Mahila Mandals practice a progressive approach, trying to keep poor women and equality as their focal points. Their activities range from bhajans to morchas.

In Punjab's Mahila Mandals, women focus on income generating activities and village security during times of unrest. They made articulate demands to us about their needs for more funds, training, buildings and dairy cooperatives. The State has a separate lady Assistant Cooperative Registrar for women's cooperatives—a positive measure to bring women into cooperative activity.

In the Kutch area, Mahila Mandals run tailoring programmes and then supply workers to free Trade Zone industries, at Kandla. While helping many women secure employment, they have not taken up their women workers' issues of extremely low wages in FIZ employment. However, we met active leaders of village women's dairy cooperatives, in other districts.

Through Mahila Mandals in the Garhwal area of U.P. women have organized against mines which are causing land slides in catchment areas. This "Kheerakhot" movement has generated favourable response from the surrounding communities.

Rajasthan has the largest government programme of any state for developing women's awareness. We visited the Women's Development Projects operating in Udaipur and Jodhpur districts, at their meetings called 'Jajam'. The local leader is the 'Sathin'. She gets support from the 'Pracheta' who supervises 10 villages. She in turn is under a Project Director and the Collector. Women working in agriculture, forest produce gathering, animal husbandry, and road construction gathered and spoke in a free, confident manner about their occupations and social problems. The State Government maintains a very low profile, even when women from this project openly protest against government irregularities, or lack of minimum wages, food coupons, or Famine Relief Worksites.

## HEALTH ISSUES

Women workers recognize how important an asset their health is to all aspects of their lives. Despite this recognition, however, a woman's concern for her children's health and well being often eclipses any thoughts about her own condition. When the whole family is surviving on her daily income of Rs. 4, she cannot afford to take even one day off when she becomes pregnant or falls ill. We encountered sad illustrations of the toll this kind of economic necessity takes on women's health when 28 of the 30 mothers who gather forest produce in Kherwada told us they had lost at least one of their infant children. Bidi worker-mothers in Sihora, M.P. told a similar tale—53 of the 60 women we met had lost babies.

Many kinds of restrictions limit women's access to timely medical treatment. Time is a major limitation. If the health facility is very far, or a woman cannot leave her work without suffering a cut in wages, or if she simply cannot leave her children or take them with her, she will forgo the visit.

Another restriction is the kind of treatment a woman receives once she does seek help. In Nagaland and Manipur both, women complained that even at government medical dispensaries they were being charged high prices—even for injections. "The doctors are not available, and we have to pay for everything." In Madhya Pradesh the chilli pounders from Jabalpur complained that the government only comes to them for family planning—"Nasbandhi" and even after that, there is complete lack of follow up. "When we really need them—like for our children who suffer constant fever, cold, and cough then we never see help." These women themselves suffer burning in their feet and palms, respiratory problems, and general uneasiness.

In a meeting in Raipur district we happily found that 135 of the 200 women at our meeting had their infants immunized. The health leader of the Mahila Mandal was instrumental in raising this community's health consciousness and follow up care. Once when they went together to a Family Planning Camp, they refused treatment because the doctor was not using clean sheets—as they had been trained was proper.

The health problems of Maharashtrian women varied according to their occupations. Hamal headloaders of Pune experience incessant pains in the leg, back and head. They simply feel like lying

down all the time. Cement bag stitchers suffer body, finger and eye pain from the constant exposure to cement bag dust and the heavy stitching work. They said very shyly and apologetically. "Maybe a creche could at least save our children from this constant exposure." Women have never demanded creche as by way of their right. They continue to do this work whether they are sick or well.

Bombay slum women suffer numerous health problems and visit the hospital frequently. They complained of the time they took from their work. Of 200 women in the meeting, 20 had suffered serious health problems related to their occupation, which now hinders their ability to continue work.

Himachal Pradesh women were more articulate in making specific health complaints. 250 of them counted their daily hours of work and reported 12 or more. Their common complaints were of fever, arthritis, stomach and body aches. Knitters suffer asthma, stitching causes eye strain and backache, stone cutting caused back problems. In the public health centres, medicines are not available, and the prescriptions made by doctors are always too costly. Some women told us, the hospitals are very far, and many of us die on the road trying to reach there for treatment.

In Bihar, 70% of village women we met reported that they give birth to their children at home with the help of dai. Punjab women also told us that the "dai is better" than hospital births. Rural Rajasthani women said they only go to a hospital for delivering their babies if there is a serious complication.

Tamil Nadu village women also practise child birth at home. They use the services of an ANM and neighbours. Their common problems with T.B. could not be helped at home though. They, along with Madras women, demanded both better services in the hospital, and a creche service for their children in the hospital.

Orissa fisherwomen suffer severe skin infections on their feet because of working constantly in water full of fertilizers. "Blinding headaches" also plague them, from endless hours in the sun. Punjab and Madhya Pradesh agricultural labourers suffer giddiness and infections from their high exposure to chemical fertilizers. Ropemakers in Tamil Nadu and Kerala suffer deep cuts across their palm and fingers, which they treat with warmed coconut oil at night. Cashew shellers suffer eczema from the oil the nut exudes.

Calcutta prostitutes suffer venereal disease, gastric troubles, appetite loss and fatigue. Cheap liquor takes a great toll of their health.

Papad rollers in Gujarat suffer burns in palms and wrist pain. Sulphur loaders fertility at Kandla Port has been affected. Groundnut shellers of Jamuna Nagar have open mouth sores, and cottonpod shellers of Wadhwan suffer finger infections and irregular menstrual cycles. Lacemakers of Narsapur, A.P., and spinners everywhere suffer eyestrain and headache due to the fineness of their work.

In Banda district U.P. almost all women and children have night blindness. They eat mainly wheat for every meal of the day hardly ever vegetables. Fruits and milk are simply unheard of. None of the children are immunized.

Gujjars, the migrant shepherds of J & K, suffer premature birth and deaths due to their long days of walking. They also suffer anemia, worms, skin infections, arthritis and goitre. Carpetweavers suffer joint pain, embroiderers, eyestrain. The head of a government hospital in J & K suggested that ANMS were unnecessary because they are not fully trained like nurses, nor do they have experience or the social acceptance of a traditional dai. She suggested concentrating on the dais.

## ALCOHOL CRISIS

"This man of mine  
returns home drunk  
Sathin, he beats me every day  
I toil the whole day,  
Sathin, I cannot bear the beating."

This was the song a WDP group of Rajasthani rural women in Pai village sang to us in their traditional note when we went to visit them. They were demanding that liquor distillation be banned in their area. Unfortunately, this song could gain consensus in most areas of India. It is a lament we heard from many women entrenched in the poverty that alcoholism brings upon countless families.

Women in Solan, Himachal Pradesh, put it this way: "When we ask the government for schools, it

takes 10 years, but the liquor shops appear instantaneously—without even asking. In fact, they appear despite our vocal protests!" They were very agitated about the government's policy to open liquor vending shops for revenue. The Mahila Mandals' policy demand is that no liquor vending shops should be opened in any areas without the Resolution of a 2/3 majority of the village people to do so.

Simla women echoed their disgust. "If the government was really interested in our welfare, they would not open these 'thekkas'. While the government's income is increasing, we become poorer day by day," one woman said. Another added, "If sugar, kerosene, foodgrains and other things of necessity are under ration, why is liquor sale unlimited?" Liquor and poverty were a clearly linked equation for these women.

And though tribals in Orissa have licenses which permit them to distill only a certain quantity of liquor for home consumption and festival times, it is not adhered to. Temperance is difficult to maintain because alcoholism is high amongst them. "Development work proceeds slowly, if at all, in these areas, because of the negative effects of liquor on people's motivation," one voluntary agency worker told us. There is a belief amongst the men that they cannot work hard without drinking.

When we asked some fishermen why they drank so much, they replied, "We work in water, on the sea, it is cold. To keep warm, we have to drink hard."

The voluntary worker asked, "How come women work harder than you, and still survive—without drinking?"

The response was, "They are women after all." Domestic workers in the Hyderabad slums said that many of them are either deserted or widows due to alcoholism amongst their men. Their priority was the total prohibition of liquor in the town. Women sweepers in Jammu also reported one of their major problems as alcoholism amongst the men of their community. One sweeper said, "They drink, but it has such bad effects on us. Our hard earned income is snatched to support this habit."

A nurse in Pune reported how bad these effects can be. She said, "We used to see women widowed or deserted due to their men drinking. But more and more we see suicide attempts by women who cannot tolerate the strain this problem puts on their lives either the poverty, or the beating, or just the everyday abuse."

Women in Kachipuram told us, "Here in our villages, there are no liquor shops, but you will find all the men in our community drinking, you understand?"

Uttarkhand Kausani women said, quite frustrated, "We could not solve this problem even after organizing. We had solved the problem to a great extent, but the government did not back us in followup so the problem slowly seeped back in."

Women in the Punjab told us that "90% of our men drink as if they have to drink. The young drink more than the old. The son drinks more than the father and ruins his youth. Every village has at least one shop that drains our earnings."

Bombay slum women's solution to that problem was that 'the drunkard's salary should go directly to his wife, and not given in his own hands.'

In Assam the effects even filter down to hinder girls' education. Drinking is a serious problem on the plantations, so mothers have stopped sending their girls outside to school because they meet harassment coming home in the dark.

"In my village there must be 360 households of Rajputs, but I am the only one working as a Sathin like this." Ghisibai, Sathin of WDP at Pai village, Rajasthan told us. "I am the only woman dealing with men and women like this, and they have realized that I am not a shy type."

"Let me tell you an example of what happened to me in this job. I was passing through the village street one day with tea in one hand and snacks on a plate in the other hand. I passed some seated men, who stopped me. One offered, 'Pass those things to me—I will hold them while you draw your gunghat' I said, 'Listen brother, you need not to advise me, if I draw ghunghat and then abuse you people, is this good? Or if I do not draw gunghat, and treat people with respect, is this bad? It is no longer necessary that I always draw it, or that I never draw it. And I walked on, still carrying my things.'

Despite Manipur women's hard work, their notable contribution to Manipur economy, and their usual self-reliance, they felt insecure due to the polygamy custom many of their husbands practice. He often brings another woman to the family, and usually at a later stage of married life. She feels like she



works and rears the children, while he enjoys with the other wife. One for work, one for enjoyment. This custom is prevalent right up to men holding the highest offices in the state. And it is increasing with the increase in black money. But most Manipur women are too proud to even mention this problem to others.

Amongst Assam women there is no dowry, no purdah, and women hold traditional rights to land, though the land right is declining in practice.

In Himachal Pradesh there is also no dowry and no purdah practices. The incidence of women's desertion is high in Bilaspur, Sirmour, and Solan districts as reported to us by women lawyers. Parents delay sending their earning daughters to her in-laws, and the man subsequently deserts her. Her parents then claim, and often receive, 'reet'—bride money or maintenance.

Dowry is a major problem in Kerala. Fish vendors (quite poor) reported having to pay Rs. 15,000-25,000 for their daughters' dowries.

Girls being sacrificed in lieu of some blessing from God (usually for a son) are left abandoned as devadasis in some districts of both Maharashtra and Karnataka. The root cause is poverty. Families cannot maintain their daughters, so she is thrown out to fend for themselves—with God's sanctification.

In UP, MP, Bihar and Gujarat, Muslim women in purdah work at bidi rolling, garment stitching, chikan work, Zariwork, weaving and lace making, and the like. Because of purdah, they cannot go to the employers to collect and deliver their goods. They are thus quite vulnerable to middlemen, or they are forced to send their children. Then they suffer because I.D. cards are not issued in their own names. Some women though, are now defying purdah. Saira of Lucknow moves freely in the streets in her tricycle made especially for her handicap. She said to us, "Though my mother keeps burkha, I never will!" Famidabi, a bidi worker from Bhopal, while travelling to Delhi to speak on behalf of her bidi working sisters, abandoned burkha at the taunts of her followers, "Will you bring revolution having your burkha on?" Though her son did not approve, her husband did not mind!

In women's dairy cooperatives in Bihar, uppercaste women sent their men or a servant to deliver milk to the cooperative, as they were in purdah. Now, though, this is gradually changing as these women move out to take training in Patna, Madras, and Anand.

In the Calcutta meeting of voluntary agencies, we received many complaints of the high cost of a daughter's wedding in West Bengal.

Purdah also exists in Punjab, DWACRA women there took 2 years to overcome their purdah constraint.

## WOMEN'S PRIORITIES

Women in Rajasthan asked for marketing organisations, fair prices for their forest produce, water (especially rains), loans, better wages, regular work, and "More famine relief work."

Women in Manipur demanded a halt to army harassment, a solution for the drug abuse amongst their children, health services, better loans for working capital, a credit facility and regular work.

Nagaland women wanted to learn to dye wool, better marketing opportunities, sheds for vendors, removal of new liquor shops and drug smuggling, and health services.

Assamese women want a booklet about their rights as workers, to be published in Assamese. They want Mahila Samitis to have more activities. They want some permanent measures against floods, access to loans, training in veterinary science, and like everywhere—"Regular work."

Women in Madhya Pradesh demanded "Stop rejections and deductions in bidis." "Give us fair price for forest produce." "We need more rice and cloth at cheaper rates," "a recovering mortgage law", and "more women in the mines." "We need water on our own land so we will not have to migrate to Jammu." Women of Jhabua demanded fair price of the collected Jendu leaves.

Himachal Pradesh women want irrigation systems, schools of every level in each village, food-processing and veterinary training, and banning of alcohol shops in their villages.

Kerala women's needs are transport for fish vendors, loans, and banning of mechanized trawlers.

Women in Maharashtra articulated many demands to us. They want regular work, fair wages, alternative work in factories, creches, potable water, fodder, places in the market, workspace in the

slums, licenses, I.D. cards, banning of mechanization in tobacco factories, and a Board for Domestic Workers.

Karnataka women voiced their needs for an accommodation in villages for female functionaries and extension workers.

Bihar women want fair wages for spinners, "more income", cheap foodgrains, mahila banks, and a balwadi in every village.

Priorities for Tamilnadu women included credit, housing, worksheds, jobs for their sons, regular work, and better market links for weavers. They demanded old-age and widow pension payments at a higher rate and regularly, overtime was for domestic workers, no more eviction from slums, creche facilities, and a Board for construction workers.

In West Bengal, women mine workers asked for lighter work. They also demanded pensions, loans, and a halt to mechanization in the mines.

Women in Orissa wanted safety equipment provided to them in the mines, more jobs for women in the mines, and medical facilities.

Women in Punjab wanted the government to run a production centre and to lend help in marketing. They pressed for implementation of minimum wages. They asked for fish ponds to be given to women for farming. And they want electricity.

In Gujarat women want alternative work for those displaced from mining. Their other demands include higher wages, regular salary, licenses, water, cheap access to raw materials, and regular electricity.

The pressing needs of Uttar Pradesh women were for cheap essential commodities, potable water, medical facilities, and fodder.

Licences, credit, 'a dignified life' and fodder were the major priorities of Andhra Pradesh women.

Jammu and Kashmir women had the basic priorities of more work, more income, and a reliable fuel supply other than wood.

"Why not plan to bring water from the sky.  
Why not plan to hold water in our land?  
For the sake of work we travel to distant lands,  
Let us plan ourselves,  
Let us plan ourselves..."

(WDP women of Pai villages)

## VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

We met local voluntary organizations in most of the states we travelled. Many of them are taking up the most difficult and remarkable task of organizing the exploited, unorganized women workers. The common goal shared by these various organizations is to improve the quality of life of these workers. Depending on local needs and the organization's leadership, there is a wide range of approaches and structures each group employs to achieve its goals.

Some organizations take up women's rights issues. They make demands for women's access to assets, or to minimum wages, or to the rights that existing legislation is supposed to grant them. Other organizations concentrate more on a welfare approach, providing services which are not available from governmental agencies. Some groups work to implement government anti-poverty programmes, or provide training and income-generating activities. Others combine some or all of these approaches.

All the voluntary organizations we encountered were very supportive of the Commission's work. They helped in our data collection by filling out questionnaires on behalf of their women members. Wherever a Commission meeting was organized, these organizations came and brought women workers to meet us. We consistently observed that women involved in organizations like these had much greater awareness of their legal rights and ways to acquire them, than unorganized women ever did. Many of the women associated with voluntary organizations presented memorandums to the Commission, putting forth their demands.

In separate meetings with the organizers themselves, they shared their expert knowledge with us about the problems, priorities, and experiences of organizing they had faced with these women. The recommendations which emerged from their experiences have been incorporated into this report.

## COMMISSION'S TOUR METHODOLOGY

To get a better understanding of women from the unorganized sector in the country, the Commission decided to visit as many states as possible where they would hold public hearings and meet women at their workplaces. In February 1987 the Commission faced the difficult task of organizing tours to meet unorganized women.

The Commission began by making their appeal in regional languages through newspapers, radio and T.V.

This appeal was made in February and March while the Commission substantially wrote a general letter to the Chief Secretary of each State, and contacted voluntary organizations and researchers.

Good response from all fronts began to shape the Commission's tour plan. They planned a 7-month tour of 17 states, beginning with the mountain areas and the North-East first, to avoid the monsoons. Due to the shortage of time, the Commission opted to visit those economic activities specific to each area they visited. They arranged to meet not only individual women called to public hearing, but also planned to visit voluntary organizations, institutions, actual work places and government officials.

A week before the Commission's arrival in a certain state, each State Government announced their visit again on television, radio, and in the news to help attract women to the public hearings.

When the Commission was received in each State, they were clear and firm about refusing all ceremonies and formalities and dismissing and security guards or escorts which had been arranged for them. They proceeded right to the public hearings which had been arranged. Usually 100-200 women were present. Without any garlanding or welcome speeches, the Chairperson or one of the members of the Commission began the meeting by standing up and giving some background information about how the National Commission was set up. She emphasized in very simple words that the Government had begun to realize that without women's participation, no country can progress. They understood the need for improving women's lives, since women contribute so much to the national and family economy. The Government of India had therefore sent the Commission to study the existing condition of women workers in the unorganised sector.

The Chairperson said the Commission had come to seek out their views, opinions, thoughts, feelings and problems. She encouraged the women to tell the Commission the difficulties they encounter in their work and their lives, their priorities and suggestions, or whatever they felt like discussing.

After this, the Commission introduced themselves as individuals. It was explained that they are not politicians or government officials and that they were not out to seek votes. They gave these introductions of themselves: "one Commission member is a journalist hails from Garwhal; one is a Professor and Director of Social work from Bombay; one is the Planning Commission Adviser hails from Tamil Nadu; one is from Bengal where she is doing research on women's conditions; and the last is from Gujarat where she does social work with women like these. One other member who is not present is a social worker in South India."

Then the Commission introduced the Member Secretary, a senior level IAS Officer from Haryana whom the GOI deputed to facilitate the National Commission's work. At this point the Commission emphasized that they were not going to give the women anything—no grants, subsidies, loans, anything—and urged them not to form expectations. Instead, they said, we are here to convey your ideas and problems to those who can work on solving them. Our mission is strictly fact finding.

Then the Commission began to explain the presence of the video camera. They pointed to the Recorder and said she will faithfully write down everything that you say today. Your ideas will be reported to the GOI and the outside world. To avoid any mistake in understanding or interpreting, the Commission also wants to give this video report to the GOI, so they can hear these ideas straight from your mouth, face to face, in your own voice. The Commission urged the women not to be afraid of the camera—it was not T.V., it would not come on T.V., none of their 'sahibs' or 'seths' would see it.

With those details, introduction of the side of the Commission finished, they asked the women for their introduction by way of certain common questions, to which the women raised their hands.

- How many of you have land?
- How many of you are engaged in raising cattle?

- How many of you work on some craft in your home?
- How many of you go to vend or hawk something in the markets or the streets?
- How many go out to do labour of any kind?
- How many have no other earning member in your family besides you? Why? Where are your men?  
(From this question women began to talk).
- How many of you have lost children before they reached 5 years of age?
- How many of you have your own bank account?
- How many have taken IRDP, TRYSEM, or other loans?
- How many of you are ready to receive training? What kind of training would you like?
- How far is water from your home?
- How far is fuel?
- How far is the hospital?
- How many have joined Mahila Mandals or cooperatives?
- How many read newspapers or hear radio or T.V.?
- How do you get news?
- Do you deliver your children in hospitals or with a dai?
- How many have ration cards?
- How many of you know about these laws:  
Minimum Wage Act?  
Equal Remuneration Act?  
IRDP Loans?
- Who is the 'Sarkar' for you? What has been your experience with them?
- What are your priorities?

These questions, more or less in this order, prepared the atmosphere for the women to talk about themselves. They talked individually about their work—the mechanics of the jobs, their incomes, ways they are exploited, their experiences with government officials and police, with banks, with forest guards, with cooperatives, about how they obtain raw materials, or loans, or if they get any healthcare. They talked about alcoholism in their needs, priorities, and suggestions. Some talked at length, articulately—some with anger, and some with tears.

Despite the Commission's introduction, women's expectations were raised that they would receive immediate help. In the cases of some urgent feasible solutions, e.g. pension cases pending, or guidance for legal aid, the Commission contacted the concerned officer there and then. Otherwise they had to leave the women with their unfulfilled expectations.

The Commission had a mixed experience in finding good translators during their tour. Whenever possible, they preferred to engage a research scholar from the State. State Government officers also helped willingly. There was often a tendency for the translator to condense and edit with an unconscious bias. A few were negative, so that the Commission had to dismiss them. A lady social welfare officer in Kashmir and one in Madhya Pradesh were the ideal translators.

The meetings took place in Circuit Houses, school compounds, Panchayat buildings, along roadsides, under a tree, at various workplaces, in homes, hostels, institutes, town halls, at farms, mines, plantations, coop or union offices, Mahila Samiti buildings, and in factories. In very state the Commission also met the voluntary organizations who are dealing either actively and/or through research with workers of the unorganized sector. To these meetings the Commission also invited those who had shown interest in the Commission's work by responding to the public appeal.

The Voluntary Organizations were specifically asked to respond on these points:-

1. What were their own observations about the condition and problems of poor women and their work?
2. What were their experiences in organizing these women?
3. What did they know about the delivery of the various programmes/schemes for these women?
4. What were the problems of the Voluntary Organizations themselves?
5. What were their suggestions regarding the programmes and policies of the Government?

The Voluntary Organizations gave active response to the Commission's queries. Besides the public hearings, the informal meetings with women in their workplaces, and sessions with voluntary

# PREFACE

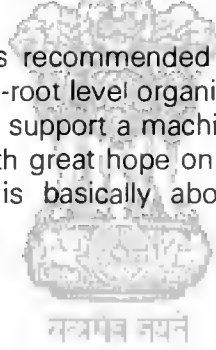
When the Prime Minister announced the formation of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women, I had no idea the responsibility would fall on me to carry out its objectives despite my years of lobbying for such a Commission.

This Commission has been an overwhelming experience for me to meet and listen to the great women of India working in fields, forests, factories, mines, their homes or on mountains, roads, shores or in downtown markets. I now realise that they are not categories: 'self employed' or 'formal informal sector' they are like the rest of Indian working population. They are distinct only to the extent that their worker status is more unstable, more vulnerable.

I learnt these women are better fighters against poverty than their men, have more calculative, stable, forwardlooking strategies to deal with their own environment, yet the women remain poorer. But this cannot be proved through Research Studies.

Awareness has spread with education, though slowly, in the country. Awareness of their rights, and they being protected 'somewhere' by 'someone' is there in the back of their minds. The new opportunities are gradually catching their attention. In every group that we met, there were one or two bright, articulate, defiant young women ready to act as catalysts for a better future. I may venture to make a generalisation that everywhere in the country, these women are ready to absorb new ideas, more assistance, even to get organised to better their future. This is the most imminent challenge posed before us by these women today. If left to women's Groups and to the poor women's own efforts, it is unlikely that such organisations will come up that soon, and in large numbers to make a significant dent on the situation of these women.

That is why, the Commission has recommended to the Government to actively help initiate and maintain a network of grass-root level organisations like Village Mahila Mandals. It is ironic that one is asking the State to support a machinery to promote action for change in state policies, but we have done it with great hope on the strength of the Foreword of our Seventh Plan stating 'Development is basically about people'. Women (people) must

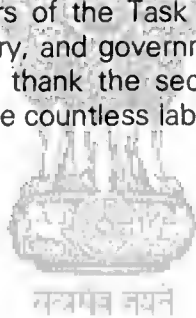


participate if the nation has to develop. Therefore, I strongly plead for entrusting the Village Mahila Mandals with the responsibility, one, of implementation of poverty alleviation programmes to begin with, and, two block level planning, monitoring and setting targets for women's development at the local level. To fight the wrath of nature, droughts and floods, I believe Village Mahila Mandal is the best vehicle.

Everywhere in the country we found women were the most committed proponents of our future. A concern for future is strong within them. So, the future of the nation lies in the hands of these (poor) women. No doubt, they have thought of plans for future, and also share, the dream of entering the 21st century with steadier step along with the Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi. Therefore, we recommend a fair, concrete share for women in the coming Eighth Plan.

Many comprehensive policy recommendations have been outlined in the final chapter of this Report. They will help to lead us into the Eighth Plan with a positive sense of moving towards equality and social dignity for all our citizens. They are only small seeds of change, but every year we see the women of this country cultivate abundant crops from such small seeds.

I take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Government of India for setting up such an important Commission to find ways and means to ameliorate the sufferings of the unprotected labouring women. I thank the distinguished Members of the Commission. My special thanks to Dr. A. Desai and Smt. Mrinal Pande for their valuable contributions. Dr. Desai's probing mind and objective approach has enriched the subject matter of the Report. Smt. Pande with her vast experience in media actively helped in the preparation of the Video Report. I would like to thank Dr. R. Thamarajakshi for diligently going through the final draft of the report. I thank Miss Veena Kohli, Member Secretary for her energetic, dedicated contribution to prepare the Report, and in time. I thank members of the Task Force, and others scholars, numerous voluntary agencies all over the country, and government officials in various States for their advice and cooperation. I particularly thank the secretariat for their untiring, ever smiling teamwork. All my humble thanks to the countless labouring women whom I met, as they are the Shakti personified.



*Ela R Bhatt*  
**Ela R. Bhatt**

organizations in each State, the Commission also met with the Secretaries of Rural Development, Labour, Home and Child Welfare, Cooperatives, Cottage Industries, Health, Corporations of Handloom, Handicraft, Women's Development, and Sericulture. They were usually headed by the Chief Secretary or the Minister concerned. The Commission conveyed their tour observations to the officers during these meetings, gave suggestions, and checked some information with them to get their understanding of the problems. Despite the Commission's extensive planning, their numerous letters to each state, and their clear objectives, they fell into the same trap over and over again. When they arrived in several states, government officials thought they were the "Commission for the unemployed" or "Commission for Women's Welfare" or for "Social Welfare".

They could not grasp the Commission's objectives to study working women in the unorganized sector, and again and again they turned the Commission over to the Social Welfare Department, which had arranged for them to visit orphanages, destitute homes, and social welfare training programmes. Then the Commission would have to cancel this programme and begin from scratch. In so many places, the government's concept of women as workers was completely lacking.

Out of all these meetings, a detailed tour diary was kept as well as 50 hours of video recordings. From this material the Commission's tour report has been edited for this chapter.

## SOLE SUPPORTERS

* Calcutta meeting	46/72
Slums	28/60
* Ahmedabad Slum	30/69
Veraval girls	19/33
* FTZ	23/40
* Aurangabad (bidi)	15/50
Jamkhed (rural)	7/40
EGS Worksite	75/125
Ahmednagar (rural)	28/200
Ellora Milk dairy	52/200
Bombay 'Annapurna'	12/50
Bombay Dharari Slums	42/100
Pune Slum	36/60
Domestic Workers	11/20
* Tamil Nadu	7/60
Kanchipuram	12/35
Vellore	42/100
Madras	
* Kashmir: Achbal (rural)	10/100
Shrinagar	4/40
Jammu (slum)	17/50
* Hyderabad: Slums	50/100
* U.P:	
Banda Stone Crushers	26/40
Garam Pani, Garhwal	24/60
Lucknow city, Chikan workers	36/60





* Rajasthan:	31/65
Udaipur dist.	136/250
Jaipur dist.	
* Punjab:	13/25
Ludhiana—Sports goods workers	71/160
Jalandhar	
* Orissa:	35/50
Mine workers	4/7
Artisans	6/40
Agriculture	10/50
Fisherwomen	90/160
* Bihar:	89/150
Rural	
* Kerala:	30/55
Trivandrum fisherwomen	9/15
Coir workers (rural)	13/32
Cashew factory	
* Karnataka:	
Bangalore slums	42/60
Bangalore slums	21/30
* Himachal Pradesh:	
Kulu	10/250
Kulu	24/100
Solan	22/200
Simla	25/125
* M.P.:	
Jabalpur bidi workers city	93/150
Bidi rural	63/100
Forests	19/30
	21/40
Mines	21/30
* Assam:	10/40
Gauhati	63/125
Tezpur	75/125
Tezpur	50/200
Plantations	10/60
	10/19
Weavers	
* Nagaland:	
Kohima Village	12/50
Market women	19/40



# 1

## INTRODUCTION

Labouring women in the self-employed and informal sector are an important segment of the labour force. They do arduous work as wage earners, piece-rate workers, casual labour and paid and unpaid family labour. The economic and social conditions of the women are dismal. This has been a matter of concern not only for persons outside the Government, but also within the Government. Although there is no obvious discrimination against women in the plans and programmes, and there are special schemes for them, in implementation, various socio-economic forces have operated against them. This concern is voiced in the Government Notification No. 9-11/85-WW dated 5 January 1987 constituting the National commission on Self Employed Women as given below:-

Despite the existence of various Constitutional legal provisions safeguarding women's employment a large number of women workers particularly in the unorganised sector suffer from various disadvantages relating to their working lives as well as in their homes. The coverage of labour laws has not benefitted these women workers in many crucial areas especially health, maternity and social security. With the changing social and economic conditions, women's productive roles have assumed new significance but without back-up support and services a healthy combination of women's productive and reproductive roles cannot be sustained.

2. The National Commission on Self Employed Women was constituted by the Government to make a **comprehensive** study of the working and living conditions of poor women in **poverty**.

3. The composition of the National Commission is:

1. Smt. Ela R. Bhatt (M.P.)	Chairperson
2. Dr.Armaity S. Desai	Member
3. Dr. R.Thamarajakshi	Member
4. Smt. Mrinal Pande	Member
5. Smt. Jaya Arunachalam	Member
6. Miss. Veena Kohli	Member-Secretary

4. Dr. Vina Mazumdar was nominated on the National Commission vide Notification No. F.9-110/85-WW dated 5 January 1987. She resigned on 14 June 1987. Her resignation was accepted vide Notification No.F.9-110/86-WW dated 1.9.1987.

5. The terms of reference of the Commission are as follows:

- (i) To examine the present status of women in the self-employed sector with special reference to employment, health, education and social status.
- (ii) To assess the impact of various labour legislations on the self-employed specially in respect of maternity benefits and health insurance.
- (iii) To identify the constraints on increase of productivity of self-employed women and the gaps in training, credit, upgradation of skills and marketing.
- (iv) To survey employment patterns, including production relations and assess their impact on the wages of the self-employed women.
- (v) To undertake a survey of the effects of macro policies relating to investment, production and technology on the status of self-employed women.
- (vi) To consider the link between the productive and re-productive roles of the self-employed women, with special reference to their health status.
- (vii) To suggest measures relating to all sectors for removing the constraints which adversely affect the integration of self-employed women in the national development process.

According to a further notification No. F. 9-110/86-WW dated 1 April 1987 the above terms of reference were extended to cover all unprotected women labour in the country and extend to women in the informal sector.

6. The Commission decided that it will cover and study the entire gambit of unprotected labouring women to include self employed and wage labour, paid and unpaid labour and contract labour. The Commission decided to cover following categories of workers:

- (a) Women doing manual work like agriculture, construction labour and other sectors.
- (b) Home-based producers (including artisans and piece-rate workers).
- (c) Women engaged in processing work in traditional and non-traditional areas.
- (d) Providers of services like washerwomen, scavengers and domestic help.
- (e) Petty vendors and hawkers who do not hire labour except for taking the assistance of family members.
- (f) And all other poor labouring women, in the unprotected sector not covered in the preceding sections.

7. In view of the wide scope of the concept of worker the Commission has used the terms 'self-employed'; 'informal' and 'unorganised' in the report interchangeably.

8. The Commission also decided that all the terms of reference should be addressed to the following three objectives:

- (i) To bring into visibility poor unprotected labouring women to which the large majority belong.
  - (ii) To bring out the contribution of the target group of women as mentioned at (i) above to the family economy and national economy.
  - (iii) To identify and examine the successful methodologies in organising the unorganised women labour.
9. The Commission adopted threefold strategy for carrying out its work:
- (i) It decided to harness and analyse the existing research and studies available and commission new studies, wherever necessary.
  - (ii) The Commission decided to tour the country in order to have meetings with women in the target group and to get direct evidence. The Commission decided to have a video coverage of its tours so that an authentic visual report could be presented to the Government which would relate to the conditions of the women workers in their own words.
  - (iii) The Commission issued questionnaires to women to get basic information.
10. The membership of the Commission being very limited, it was not possible for the Members of the Commission to study and cover the vast area of the subject assigned to it. It, therefore, decided to have five Task Force Groups. The composition of the Task Force Groups is given in Appendix II. Except for the Task Force on Workers, all the other four Task Force Groups had experts/academicians/activists/field workers in the respective areas. The four Task Force Groups aimed to study:
- (i) The impact of macro-policies and the role of development agencies, and the concept/definitions adopted by the official data collection agencies.
  - (ii) Occupational Health.
  - (iii) Communication network systems.
  - (iv) Legislative protection.
11. Task Force Groups in turn commissioned fifty-seven new studies the list of which is given at Appendix V.
12. The fifth Task Force of Workers was constituted, the scope of which extended to the following
- (i) area of exploitation
  - (ii) experience of organizing
  - (iii) women workers' priorities as perceived by them
13. Since members of this Task Force were not all literate, the report was given partially in writing and partially orally which was subsequently documented.
14. The Commission requested certain experts to prepare review papers, Eight review papers on subjects like Handloom, Domestic Workers, Impact of Urban Development, Vendors, Anti-poverty Programmes, Impact of Macro Policy on Women Workers in Mines and Child Care Service were prepared.
15. The Commission sent ten lakh questionnaires to be filled by or on behalf of women of the target group to all the States and Union Territories. After a considerable follow up, the Commission received 1.40 lakhs questionnaires which were computerised. The findings were interesting and some of these have been corroborated by the Commission's tour observations and other sources.
16. The Commission also had meetings with the following:
- 1. Smt. Margaret Alva, Minister of State, Department of Women and Child Development.
  - 2. Smt. P. J. Jayakar, Adviser to Prime Minister.

3. Women Members of Parliament.
4. Smt. Kumudben Jhoshi, Governor, Andhra Pradesh.
5. Shri Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister, West Bengal.
6. Begum S.M. Abdullah, Jammu and Kashmir.
7. State Ministers of Women's Departments and other related Departments.
8. Secretaries in the Government of India, holding charge of Ministries/ Departments of Women and Child Development, Rural Development, Welfare, Labour and Education.
9. Chairman and Members of the State Advisory Boards.
10. Chairman/Managing Director, Women's Development Corporations.
11. State Labour Commissioners.
12. Central Trade Union Leaders.
13. Representatives of Voluntary Agencies.
14. Managing Directors of Forest Development Corporations.
15. Experts in Media.

17. While on tours in the States, apart from meeting women workers, representatives of workers organizations and voluntary agencies, the Commission also had meetings with State Government officers which were generally presided by the Minister in charge of Women's Programme or the Chief Secretary. This willing support of a cross section of persons including women workers enabled the Commission to complete its task of writing its report which is the first investigation of its kind at a national level.

18. The National Commission was initially constituted for a period of one year. In view of the wide scope of its study, it was not possible for the Commission to give its report during this period and an extension of 6 months was given to the Commission upto 4 July 1988 vide Notification No. 9-110/85-WW (Vol.II) dated 11 February 1988. For the first year of the Commission's functioning, the Government had allocated Rs. 48 lakhs. The Commission, however, exercised great restraint. The approximate expenditure of the Commission which includes the extended tenure, is Rs. 29.50 lakhs. This amount has been incurred on the constitution of Task Forces, commissioning of studies, field visits of the Commission to 18 States, getting the questionnaires prepared and filled and analysis of the data received, video coverage of women workers and office expenditure.

19. The Commission is conscious of the limitations of its Report. The task given to it is very massive, the number of women workers involved are very large, the problems that these women face are vast. As against this, there was almost total absence of data in the critical aspects of the work and life situations of the women in the self employed and informal sectors. It was not possible for the Commission within the time frame to get a fresh census done nor was it possible to commission studies at the national level. The Commission would have also liked to have met many more women workers than it actually did. However, in spite of these constraints, the Commission has tried its best to put together in this Report the issues concerning the labouring women, examined the existing institutions and mechanisms and given recommendations for future action. In doing so the Commission has tried to voice the feelings and aspirations of the labouring women. This Report is accompanied by a Video Report which is an authentic account of the labouring women in their own voices regarding how they perceive their work and life situations, their concerns and suggestions for a better life.

20. The Commission is grateful to the Government for the faith and confidence that it reposed in it. The Commission does hope that its study will be useful to the Government and to other institutions and voluntary agencies who work for these women.

income, they are not perceived as workers by either the women themselves or the data collecting agencies and the Government as all of them do not recognise the multidimensional functions of women which include their productive and reproductive labour. Women quite often are the major earners for their families. This also goes unrecognised.

5. Similarly, the approach of Government to women's development is one of adhocism leading to marginal benefits. The declaration of the International Year for Women generated many debates on the status of women. The Government appointed a Committee on the Status of Women which made a comprehensive study of the problems of all women. A Chapter on Women was included in the Sixth Plan which was followed by attempts to cover women under poverty alleviation programmes and the starting of a few new schemes. However, Government programmes designed for women have not been proportionate either to their needs or their numbers. As far as labouring women are concerned, there has been no thrust to improve their lot by concerted efforts. This is in spite of the fact that the Seventh Five Year Plan Document recognises the plight of working women. In the context of women's role in agricultural production the Document records:

Women play an important role in agricultural production, animal husbandry and other related activities such as storage, marketing of produce, food processing etc. Apart from these they spend almost 10-12 hours per day doing household chores, including fetching of water and gathering of fuel. Large number of female labour are engaged in marginal occupations in order to supplement the family income by collection of fish, small game, firewood, cowdung, maintenance of kitchen gardens, tailoring, weaving and teaching, *quantification of these activities in terms of work hours contributed, or its income generating equivalent, was not attempted or recorded* (emphasis added). Some of the new technologies have displaced women from many of the traditional activities. The incomes of the poor households are increased by women, although they have to face many problems due to family responsibility, limited mobility and social restrictions. The Green Revolution has led to increased demands for casual labour, dispossession of small landholders from their land and consequently, pushing out of women from such small land holdings to become wage earners. Though many of the tasks performed by males are getting mechanised, the women continue to toil in labour intensive jobs, like rice transplantations cleaning and storage of grain in post harvest operations, picking of leaves and fruits, hand shelling of groundnut, picking out common seed etc.

6. In the Planning processes, under the trickle down theory it was expected that women will equally benefit along with men. This has been belied by actual developments. The Sixth Plan Document recognises that "in spite of the development measures the Constitutional legal guarantees women, have lagged behind in almost all sectors." In the past decades, there have been various forces and pressures which have reduced women to a low and secondary place. These forces have been more dominant than those which have tried to push women towards growth and development.

7. The limited achievements in the anti-poverty programmes have been more than offset by the problems of land alienation and environmental degradation, increasing agricultural poverty, concentration of resources in a few hands, increasing polarisation of the rich and the poor and polarisation between urban and rural areas. Women have been particularly hard hit by these developments.

8. In spite of their important role in agricultural production, the land reform measures like land ceiling and distribution and tenancy reforms have not benefited them because land has



Her contribution to the family income and national economy remain largely invisible and under valued.



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rarely been in the name of women. More and more common property resources have been taken over by the Government or have been privatised. This has added to the burden of women who are almost solely responsible for collecting and fetching water, gathering firewood, small game and other forest produce. Environmental degradation like deforestation and commercialization of forest resources, indiscriminate tapping of ground water resources have further aggravated women's problems. Increasing agricultural poverty has led many men to migrate in search of work, leaving their families behind to face the consequences. To this could be added large scale displacement by dams and industrial projects which do not always bring benefits to the local population. The displaced persons become pauperized and their women are worst affected since rehabilitation plans make no attempt what so ever to help the women to gainful employment to attempt to compensate the loss of the economic activity in their previous locations.

## **Gender Inequalities**

9. The labour market is not neutral to men and women. It favours men against women. Gender inequalities exist in almost all sectors. The division of labour is highly sex biased. In rice cultivation, for example, seeding, transplanting, weeding and threshing operations are women's jobs while ploughing is done by men. In the textile industry, in most areas, weaving is essentially done by men while women do spinning and other operations. Similarly, in construction work, men do the skilled jobs of brick laying while women mix mortar and carry headloads of earth and bricks.

10. The discrimination is further manifested in male and female earnings which has been revealed by micro studies, according to which operations that fetch higher wages are male preserves, whereas work of arduous nature bringing in lower wages is done by women. The same is the case in industries like bidi-making, construction work, cashew and coir. Here women are assigned unskilled work; they are paid less even in skilled operations.

11. In the urban informal sector, some of the lowest paid occupations have a disproportionately high percentage of women. In the organised sector, 90 per cent of the women are found in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. There are a large number of marginal female workers and they face strong "discouraged worker effect" in the slack season.

12. Gender inequality is also marked in acquiring educational and vocational skills. In spite of the impressive increase in total numbers of literate women the male-female gaps remain large, and a slow rate of progress of women's education is noted with a virtual stagnation in the area of technical education. The male-female gaps in enrolment tend to increase with successive higher levels of education. The rural urban differences in literacy rates continued to be much larger for women. Amongst children between 6 to 11 years one out of every three girls is outside the schools while the enrolment of boys is reported to be 100 per cent. The drop-out rate of girls is very high compared to boys.

13. A major short coming of the education strategy has been that workers in poverty stricken groups of landless farmers, marginal workers in unorganised sector, urban slum dwellers, workers and migrant workers have not been reached. Since women have less access to education and skill training, they lag behind in exploiting instrument through which women can attain equality. The present situation of illiteracy amongst women which is negatively related to fertility rates, & infant child mortality rates, further perpetuate gender inequalities.

## **Growth of Unorganised Sector**

14. There has been a phenomenal growth of the unorganised sector. Given the labour

market conditions and the existing socio-economic environment most of the female work force is in the informal unorganised sector. The labour force in the unorganised sector is characterised by a high incidence of casual labour mostly doing intermittent jobs at extremely low wages or are doing their own account work at very uneconomical returns. There is a total lack of job security and social security benefits. The areas of exploitation are high resulting in long hours, unsatisfactory work conditions and occupational health hazards. The organised sector takes advantage of this vulnerable position of the labour force in the unorganised sector. Large industries now find it advantageous to decentralise production units of larger registered units. The powerloom industry is a case in point where large segments of artisans and workers are not independent producers, but are either employed on piece rate basis or controlled by advances or working on substantive orders for large industrial units. A typical example is that of the large number of bidi workers. While advantages are being claimed by the principal employers on the ground that it is a small or cottage industry, the labour force is actually working for a pittance.

### **Women Headed House Holds**

15. The number of women headed households are maximum among the poor. Women headed households are a result of widowhood, migration, desertion or the illness/unemployment/addictive habits of their husbands. The delivery structures normally do not recognise women as head of households. Therefore, they are deprived of many scheme of the Government and public institutions. Secondly, they suffer a higher incidence of poverty and occupy the bottom rung of the society. There is no worthwhile social security for widows, or women who have been deserted or whose husbands have gone away as migrant contract labour and have not returned. The Commission's own assessment is that women headed households have increased in recent years although the official data collecting services do not register this.

### **Technology**

16. Modernisation and technological changes have affected women adversely. Growth of technology and commercialization have led to mass production and have also in turn resulted in some increase in employment. There has been a marginal improvement in women's employment in sectors like electronics. But the number of women who have been thrown out of employment is far greater. The introduction of new technology in the long run requires new skills. Women do not have access to these skills and training. In many cases women have been forced to move out from skilled areas to unskilled areas. Women working on their own account have also suffered due to technological changes and they are swelling the ranks of landless/casual/marginal workers. Hardly any research has been done to evolve technology which will improve the employment situation of women and alleviate their drudgery by developing tools which could make their work simple.

### **Credit Raw Material and Marketing**

Promotion of women's employment faces several obstacles, one of them being an increasingly complex marketing and credit system. Cheaper forms of credit have been made available through financial institutions but the central problem faced by women in low income earning ventures is that they have no security to offer. According to the existing schemes for small loans to women living below the poverty line, no security should be asked for, but in practice, this is insisted upon. The problems faced in extending credit to women are socio-economic. Attitudes to women do not allow them to take up independent economic

ventures. Further, women are largely unaware of the existing credit facilities or physically unable to reach the banks, particularly in rural areas. They are also reluctant to approach the banks because they are unfamiliar with the policies and cumbersome procedures which is further compounded by their illiteracy and the inability of the authorities to comprehend the credit requirements of poor women. Although women have proved themselves better in repaying of loans than men, the bias is towards men. Another obstacle is the tendency of the banks to finance large enterprises rather than small ones. Women in particular are normally involved in very small enterprises and they need small loans for carrying out their day to day business. Since credit is not easily available to them from financial institutions they invariably fall victim to the avaricious money-lenders who charge exorbitantly high rates of interest. This leads to a vicious circle where the required amount of raw material is not available because of lack of credit facilities. Since women cannot expand their ventures they are unable to face competition; they either stagnate or are weeded out of their own account work.

18. The situation in the sphere of marketing is very similar. The forces operating and controlling marketing have become complex demanding better designs and techniques and mass production. The immediate local market no longer can absorb their entire production. The synthetic ropes produced by mass production methods are competing with coir or grass ropes. Even the collective struggle of producer women may not protect their source of livelihood, let alone improve their working conditions. This decline in handicrafts was initiated during the colonial period. The Government's efforts to revitalise these old handicrafts and sick industries have been thwarted by its own counter policy of industrialisation and commercialisation of the economy. Women who are widely engaged in these handicrafts are the major victims; they steadily swell the ranks of rural labour migrants to urban areas.

19. A large section of the poor self-employed women doing their own account work who are engaged in unorganised work are exploited by various people like wholesalers and money-lenders, and even the municipal authorities and police. Even to sell their wares, they have to suffer the humiliation of being kicked and shouted at by local authorities. The system of licensing of space vendors is cumbersome and inadequate. To get a licence, women interviewed by the Commission reported that they have to fall into the system of bribery which they can ill afford.

### **Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes and Minority Groups**

20. The SC/STs have for centuries been socially ostracized and economically deprived making them the most vulnerable group. The founding fathers of our Republic recognised this fact and thus made special provisions in the Constitution for granting special privileges to them to bring them into the mainstream. However, the fact remains that in spite of the well intentioned policies of the Government and various on-going schemes/programmes for their welfare and development, the majority are not able to take full advantage of these schemes and programmes for lack of knowledge and access due to domination of powerful vested interests. Within these groups women remain more deprived.

21. Most of the SC/STs are landless labour and hence the bulk of their women folk are working at subsistence level along with their men folk as agricultural labourers, construction workers or engaged in gathering fuel, fodder and water for survival. Many are engaged in producing traditional handicraft items. These women are fighting to survive in the face of intense competition from cheaper mass produced items. The Scheduled Tribes who were mainly forest dwellers were traditionally dependent on the forest for their daily necessities. With the shrinking of the forest, the nationalization and reservation of forest lands and privatisation of common property resources, these people have been badly hit. Their women who in their traditional set up enjoyed an almost equal status with men now find their sources

of economic contribution denied to them. They turn to migrant labour which is one of the most vulnerable groups in the country.

22. The official statistics as available in the thirty second round: NSSO (1977-78) brings out the situation very poignantly. More than 52 per cent of SC/STs in rural areas possess no land or property. Another 35 per cent own less than five acres. However, the Work Force Participation Rates among the SC/STs women is much higher compared to women from other castes and there is evidence of higher incidence of casual labour amongst these women. The difference between usual status and daily status is also quite high.

23. The minority groups like Muslims and Christians together form the bulk of the illiterate and unskilled labour. The women are at the lowest rung of literacy and skill. This perpetuates the entire cycle of lack of skills and low wages which is difficult to break. Besides, all the messages of small family norms do not apply to them as extra hand means some additional income. Furthermore the low health status leading to higher infant mortality rates makes it difficult for them to accept small family norms. Large families add to the women's already heavy work load for which they receive little in return. Not surprisingly, their health status is very low. Religious taboos and social customs also contribute to enhancing the low status of women.

## **Migration**

24. Increasing pauperization in rural areas has led to streams of migration and polarisation between rural and urban areas with considerable concentration of wealth and social services in the urban economy. In addition, there have been migrations due to displacement by irrigation and industrial projects. This has affected women on two fronts. If men migrate then women have to take the total responsibility for the family left behind. If the whole family migrates, women themselves face the problems of having to perform the dual role of earner and home maker while living and working in conditions which lack even the basic sanitary facilities. In addition, there has been increase in the workforce participation rate of marginal workers. While men may not work for a pittance, women have no choice. They suffer exploitation at the hand of contractors, (as in construction work) and have to move from place to place in search of work leading to greater hardships.

## **Health**

25. The heavy manual labour performed by women, the shocking working and living conditions, malnutrition, repeated pregnancies and poor quality of health services take a heavy toll of the health of the women. They also suffer from other occupational health hazards like postural problems pain in the joints and other such complaints. There is absence of data and lack of recognition of occupational health hazards in the unorganized sector of the country. Apart from the poor quality of health services and the poor accessibility of women to them, maternity benefits are also not available to women in the unorganised sector.

## **Invisibility**

26. While women carry the primary responsibility of bearing and rearing children, this responsibility is considered secondary to the role of male bread winners. In addition, poor women are invariably involved in economic activities. However, most of these activities are related to family occupations like agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, weaving, construction labour and cottage industries. The women's personal contribution gets merged with the family and becomes invisible. Even where she gets wages which are generally low, she is at best seen as providing supplementary income to the family. The reality,



Her contribution in production goes unrecognised.

however, is that women's income is used for the survival needs of the family. Her domestic chores are arduous yet she gets no recognition for this work. Although women have the dual role of reproduction and production, their contribution is considered as 'Secondary', 'Marginal' and 'Supplementary'. Even when women have to do vital preparatory work as in weaving, agriculture and pottery they are at best called "helpers". This under-valuation is all pervasive. It manifests itself in disparities in wages and other rewards for women labour, in access to and control over resources, in lack of infrastructural support and above all in great disparity in work burdens.

## Legislation

27. Laws for the removal of the overwhelming pressure of unemployment, women's vulnerability and a situation of surplus labour. Two factors have compounded this difficulty, the emergence of labour displacing technology and an automatic preference by employers of such technology that reduces their responsibility for labour management. Moreover, the implementation machinery of the Government is very weak. Government as an employer has proved to be a poor model. During its field visits the National Commission found that in a number of cases even the basic amenities of clean water, toilet facilities and creches were not provided in the Government run establishments/factories.

28. A widely held view is that employers show a preference for women only when they are prepared to accept lower wages than men and also because they are expected to be more docile and submissive. Thus laws for the protection of women workers such as maternity benefits, child care, removal of discrimination in wages, only result in the reduction of women

in organized employment and push them more and more into unorganized, more exploitative and invisible occupations.

29. The phenomenal growth of the unorganized sector which hardly falls within the ambit of labour and common laws has further increased the vulnerability of women who are divided by their economic conditions, class, linguistic community and caste and affects their capacity to organize themselves to fight for their rights as workers. Women's participation in trade unions and other organisations has been negligible for various reasons and has adversely affected the process of obtaining justice as provided by law. The absence of suitable legislative or administrative devices for their protection is a big stumbling block in their advancement.

## **Housing**

30. There is a direct link between income, housing and economic activity. Lack of housing particularly affects women. They are the home makers, doing almost all the household work including child care. Those women who are self employed are generally home based, so the home is also their work place. Further in our social set up women's needs for privacy are greater. While viewing the subject of housing, we have to go beyond the concept of just 'physical structure'; it includes social and community facilities, essential services and civic amenities and it is connected with employment and earnings.

31. The housing shortage is increasing in spite of programmes being taken up by the Central and State Governments. The situation is worsening in both rural and urban areas. The accessibility to land, local construction materials and natural resources is on the decline which deprive the poor women of houses. About 70 percent of women have no access to community latrine, lighting and drinking water.

32. Priorities from the women's perspective are proper kitchen, latrines, and safe areas for the children to play while they are involved in household chores. The lack of these expose women to disease and sexual attacks (when they go out into the fields in the early morning or late at night). Moreover, when they are involved in homebased economic activities and cattle care, the limitation of space makes their living conditions worse at times bordering on a sub human level with women, children and animals sleeping in the same area with little or no ventilation.

33. There has been a proliferation of shanty towns on the fringes of urban centres. To these towns and slum areas there is a movement from the impoverished rural areas in search of higher and steadier wages. Some come to live permanently while others come during the agricultural off-season but they all face a shortage of housing facilities and other civic amenities. The migratory labour position is worse as the demand of work compels them to move from place to place. Those who manage to get houses do not have any tenurial rights. They are normally unauthorised localities and face demolition and eviction.

34. Women living in urban slums, face greater difficulties than in rural areas, largely because of the terrible over-crowding, lack of privacy and lack of essential services (for which they are entirely dependent on civic authorities). Also, they are terrorised by local thugs and slum lords and face a very real threat of sexual molestation.

## **Child Care Facilities**

35. Children in these families suffer the effects of poverty and all that goes with it like malnutrition, overcrowding unhygienic conditions of living, lack of opportunities for education etc. In addition, they suffer from neglect or lack of proper time and attention from their mothers and other adults, who are pre-occupied with carrying their livelihood. Children from families which are constantly on the move, such as labourers on



roads, railways, canals and other employment guarantee schemes suffer still more disadvantages as a result of being constantly on the move. An often invisible victim is the young girl in the family who assists her mother in housework, in collecting fodder, fuel and water, in economic activities and the care of younger children.

36. The need for child care services for poor working women is undebatable; such services are necessary not only as a support service for the mother but also for the all round development of the child. The existing child care services can be grouped under three categories namely statutory, voluntary and public. There are laws which provide for creches for women in the organized sector like the Factories Act, 1948, Plantation Act, 1957, Mines Act, 1952, Contract Labour Act, 1970 and the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1980. In practice legislation has not given much relief to women. Although as estimated by the Directorate General of Employment and Training there are 34.28 lakh (September 1987) women are employed in the organized sectors, only about 50,000 children receive child care services under legislation. The creches which exist are normally of poor quality and ill-attended. And by and large, the law is evaded or only a token provision is made. Further since the legal obligation is generally linked up with the number of women workers, employment of women is discouraged or ways are found such as contract work to evade the law. As far as contract labour is concerned, again there is evasion of responsibility by the contractors.

37. In the voluntary sector, the Central Social Welfare Board provides assistance to voluntary agencies to run child care services for poor women and in the unorganised sector. The coverage is very limited. It caters to about ten thousand creches covering approximately 25 million children of less than five years. The creches are concentrated mostly in the urban and semi-urban areas.

38. In the public sector, the Integrated Child Development Services provides a package of services like supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-up and referral services for the children of less than the six years and for expectant and lactating mothers. This scheme does not provide day care services for the working mothers. The anganwadi often works for only a few hours in the morning and they normally have low quality nine pre-primary classes. Under this programme, approximately nine million children are covered.

39. In spite of the programmes that exist, the coverage is very limited. Approximately only 10 million children get the benefit of child care facilities. These facilities in many cases are only for three to four hours which do not coincide with the working hours of the mothers.

## **Political Will**

40. There is need for an integrated approach to women's development. Under the State Governments, women as a subject are relegated to the residuary area of social welfare. Only a couple of State Governments give some importance to social welfare, elsewhere, social welfare as a sector has a low priority and within this sector, women have the lowest priority. The approach has been to give marginal benefits to women in a situation of destitution and exploitation. There is basically no stake involved and no vested interest in their favour. The political potential of these women who are in large numbers has not been exploited by both women themselves and the politicians. They generally tend to cast their votes according to the wishes of their men. Political parties do not have adequate women representatives to take care of the interests of poor working women. All political parties are guilty of not owning upto the responsibility for advancing the cause of poor women even though lip service is paid to them.

## **Administration**

41. Moreover the Government machinery which is the largest delivery structure through which development resources are channelised has proved to be indifferent and ineffective in reaching the women. The reach of the voluntary agencies is limited, and they do not penetrate into all districts, blocks and panchayats. There is also a great deal of variation in their effectiveness in mobilising and organizing women to take advantage of the various developmental programmes.

42. At the planning level, there is consciousness about women's low status and a need to focus on women's development, however as far as the delivery system is concerned, it is based on a stereotyped concept of women's development where women are given some benefits in a sporadic and haphazard manner. The development agencies in their eagerness to complete their targets are not concerned whether there is an adequate coverage of women. Recently, in a few schemes like IRDP, targets are being fixed for women, but even there the achievement is below the targets. Fixing of targets under the Special Component Plan for the Scheduled Castes have proved useful. Similar fixation of targets in the case of women as a separate disadvantaged group would have facilitated their absorption in the main stream of development. The implementation machinery is largely insensitive to the basic needs of women in poverty.

## **Dissemination of Information**

43. A crucial shortcoming in the existing machinery relates to the lack of any effective the mechanism for dissemination of information amongst women regarding women's development programmes. This lack of knowledge is one of the causes for the sluggish pace of activities relating specifically to women's programmes. Inadequate pressure exerted by women groups on administrative structures has also led to the machinery not responding to the needs of women.

## **Constitution of Task Forces Groups**

44. The National Commission undertook extensive tours in the States to see for themselves the working and living conditions of poor women. The Commission had a dialogue with the working women representatives of industry, voluntary agencies, labour unions and State Government functionaries. Since the membership of the Commission is very small, they decided to constitute Task Force Groups in the critical areas of Macro Policies; Health, Communitisation, Protective Legislation and Organisation to make an in-depth study to assist the Commission in its investigation.

# 3

## DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PROFILE

The demographic and economic statistics on women in the unorganized and self-employed sector present a rather dismal picture. The data available from various agencies like the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, the National Sample Survey Organisation, Departments of Health, Education, Industries and the Directorate General of Employment & Training, give some idea of the shocking deprivation of women. The gender discrimination is clearly evident from the comparative figures for males and females i.e. on sex ratios, birth and death rates, incidence of illness and malnutrition, child marriage, access to education, migration, urbanisation, work force participation rates and structure of work force.

2 The National Commission on Self-Employed Women, commissioned, *inter alia*, two studies viz. (i) "Macro Level Changes in Women's Economic Position" by Banerjee and (ii) "Women in the Labour Force: Analysis of NSS Data by Kalpagam," to identify the current status of labouring women. Kalpagam analysis of NSS Data are based on the first two Rounds of NSS. Banerjee submitted two studies viz. (i) "Macro Level Changes in Women's Economic Position", 1987, and (ii) "Some Recent Trends in the Economic Activities of Indian Women", 1988. Some salient features of these studies as well as other data as available from various official and non-official sources on the related aspects are presented as follows.

### I. Demographic Profile

Gender Imbalances (Sex Ratio):

3 The first instance of gender imbalance is the sex ratio itself. The sex ratio—defined as the number of females per 1000 males—continues to be highly unfavourable to females. In the 1981 Census, the overall sex ratio works out to 933 (951 in rural areas and 878 in urban areas).

Table 1. Sex Ratio (number of females per 1000 males)

Year	Rural	Urban	Total
1961	966	868	941
1971	949	858	930
1981	951	878	933

Source: Census of India 1981, Series-1, India, Part-II-Special, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner for India p. 23.

4 It is disturbing to note that the age-specific sex ratio declines sharply with the increase in the age group. It may be noted that the sex ratio in the age group 0-4 years is 975. It declines to 940 in the age group 5-9 years and to 896 in the 10-14 years. The adverse sex ratio in these age groups is mainly because of the high incidence of mortality amongst females. Demographers and social scientists attribute this mainly to social discrimination and neglect of females in the matter of health care. The phenomenon of adverse sex ratio is peculiar to India and a few other developing countries. In most other countries the sex ratio is invariably favourable to females.

5 A highly pronounced rural-urban disparity in the sex ratio, as evident from the 1981 Census figures, also points to the differential attitudes and treatment to which women are subjected to. They are more confined to rural areas than the males. Rural-urban gender disparities get more pronounced in the upper age groups. In the age group of 0-4 years, the sex ratio for rural areas is 977 against 967 in urban areas. In the age group 20-24 years this widens to 1028 in rural areas, and 861 in urban areas. Again, in the age group 25-29 years the sex ratio is 1006 for rural areas, and 883 for urban areas. The existence of a very low sex ratio in metropolitan cities and urban areas on account of high incidence of male migration to urban areas and also due to sharp fall in death rates in urban areas clearly indicates relatively less access of women to urban areas. It is a pointer to their weak position in taking advantage of modernisation and development which is concentrated in urban areas.

Table 2. Sex Ratio by Broad Age Groups 1981 (females per 1000 males)

Age Group	Rural	Urban	Total
0-4	977	967	975
5-9	939	945	940
10-14	893	907	896
15-19	896	872	890
20-24	1028	861	979
25-29	1006	883	971
30-34	1019	825	965
35-39	997	830	952
40-49	940	770	897
50-59	900	786	874
60 +	955	988	961

Source: Based on Census of India 1981, Series-1, India, Part-II-Special, p. 23.

Incidence of Female Mortality:

6 The discrimination against females, is clearly borne out by the fact that though females

are universally acknowledged to be biologically stronger than males, in India, female mortality rates are generally higher than that of males. The infant mortality rate is overall 115 for females and 113 for males. The figures for rural areas are 142 for females and 130 for males and in urban areas 71 for females and 69 for males<sup>1</sup>. As a UNICEF study observes: "If female infants die at a faster rate than male infants, despite their biologically superior strength, the inference is that social neglect of female health is deeply entrenched"<sup>2</sup> A study of attendance of patients at a Primary Health Centre, in Haryana lends support to this observation. It was found that the percentage of male children receiving treatment was 76.8 as against 23.2 in the case of female children. It was also observed that often in the case of daughters, parents abstained from taking medicines and visiting dispensaries as they commonly believed that their daughters would recover on their own. A doctor poignantly commented. "People neglect daughter's treatment. For son, people take loan, sell land and spend thousands of rupees to save his life. But for daughter, even Rs. 50/ becomes too much."<sup>3</sup>

Year	Number of deaths per 1000 persons	
	Male	Female
1972	132	148
1980	113	115

Source: Seventh Five Year Plan, 1985, p. 324.

7 A study of the percentage distribution of deaths by broad age groups, as recorded in the Survey of Causes of Deaths (Rural-1985), indicates that nearly one sixth of the total female deaths occur in the age group of one year or less.<sup>4</sup> The high incidence of infant mortality is attributed, *inter alia*, to factors like low rates of female literacy and early marriage. The statistics show that the incidence of infant deaths drop significantly with the educational level of mother and with the increase in the age of marriage.

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Deaths by Broad Age Groups, 1985 (Rural)

Age Groups	Male	Female
Below one year	15.9	16.9
1-4	6.8	10.1
5-14	4.5	5.1
15-24	3.8	5.5
25-34	5.0	6.3
35-44	6.2	5.3
45-54	9.4	5.7
55 +	48.4	45.1
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey of Causes of Death (Rural) Annual Report, 1985, Office of the Registrar General, India, 1987, p.22.

8 Females in the age group 0-4 years, account for as many as 27 per cent of the total female deaths as against 23 per cent of deaths in the case of males. The overall rural-urban combined female death rate in the age group of 0-4 years is as high as 43.5 as against 40.1 in

the males. In rural areas, the female death rate in this age group is 48.1 as against 44.2 in the males.

Table 5. Age-specific Death Rates, 1982

Age Group	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-4	44.2	48.1	21.4	23.0	40.1	43.5
5-9	3.6	4.5	1.7	1.8	3.3	4.0
10-14	1.8	1.8	1.1	1.1	1.7	1.7
15-19	2.1	3.3	1.7	1.4	2.0	2.9
20-24	2.5	4.1	1.6	2.8	2.3	3.8
25-29	2.3	4.6	2.0	2.0	2.2	4.0
30-34	3.5	3.9	3.2	2.6	3.4	3.6
35-39	5.0	5.0	3.7	2.8	4.7	4.6
40-44	7.3	5.8	7.0	4.0	7.2	5.5
45-49	9.7	7.7	9.1	5.7	9.6	7.3
50-54	15.1	10.9	12.4	8.0	14.6	10.4
55-59	22.0	17.3	19.5	14.3	21.5	16.7
60-64	35.9	28.4	31.0	22.5	35.0	27.3
65-69	62.2	43.2	44.4	31.8	59.0	41.2
70 +	100.6	87.8	88.8	75.1	98.5	85.3
All ages	13.5	13.6	8.3	7.7	12.4	12.4

Source: *Vital Statistics of India, 1982*, Office of the Registrar General, India, pp. 28-29.

9 The relative incidence of deaths amongst females continues to remain higher than of males in all the age groups up to the age of 34 years. Thereafter, it becomes lower for the females than for males. An interesting inference that can be drawn from the study of sex and age-specific death rates by rural and urban areas, is that while in rural areas, the death rates for the females continues to remain higher than of the males for all the age groups till the age of 34 years, in urban areas the female death rates remain higher than of the males only up to the age of 9 years. Thereafter, the age-specific females death rates are lower than of males. Urbanisation, thus, appears to have some positive impact in reducing female death rates.<sup>5</sup>

#### Maternal Mortality and Health Status:

10 Notwithstanding the sizeable expansion in health facilities in the country, particularly during the post independence period, the maternal mortality rate continues to be as high as 418 per lakh live births <sup>6</sup> as against a negligible figure in the advanced countries. Even today, in rural areas over 70 per cent births are attended by untrained dais. In states like Rajasthan, this figure is as high as 89.9 per cent. The crude birth rate is still as high as 35.3 in rural areas and 29.4 in urban areas.<sup>7</sup> Other factors responsible for high incidence of maternal mortality include maternal ill health, malnutrition, anaemia and frequent births. There are over 140 million women suffering from malnutrition. The incidence of anaemia among rural women is as high as 80 per cent, leading to the low birth weight of babies.<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that on an average a rural female gets pregnant about six to eight times in her lifetime, spends about sixteen years in pregnancies and lactation and gives birth to more than six children, of whom about four survive. About 70 per cent of births in rural areas take place in the age group of 20-29 years. The general fertility rate continues to be as high as 153.1 births (per 1000 women in the age

group 15-59) in rural areas and 120.2 births in urban areas. In a state like Rajasthan these figures are as high as 187 in rural areas and 152 in urban areas. The total fertility rate (i.e. average number of children born alive to a woman in her reproductive span of 15-59 years) for all-India works out to be 4.8 births in rural areas and 3.5 births in urban areas. In states like U.P., Bihar, Rajasthan, the total fertility rate in rural areas exceeds an average of six births a woman.<sup>9</sup>

#### Life Expectancy

11 Life expectancy among women continues to remain lower than that of men, although, in all the developed countries women outlive men. In 1980, the life expectancy among males was reported as 52.5 years and females as 52.1 years.

Table 6. *Expectation of life at Birth*

Period	Males	Females
1951-61	41.91	40.6
1961-71	46.4	44.7
1976-80	52.5	52.1

Source: (i) Central Statistical Organisation, *Statistical Abstract*, 1985, p. 31.  
(ii) *Census of India, Occasional Paper No. 1 of 1985, SRS based Abridged Life Tables, 1976-80*, p. 31.

#### Marital Status:

12 The incidence of child marriage amongst females, as revealed in the 1981 Census, is much higher than in the males. As many as 6.6 per cent of the total females in the age group of 10-14 years are reported as married as against 2.6 per cent of males. Again, this incidence is higher in rural areas (7.8 per cent in female and 3.1 per cent in males) than in urban areas (2.2 per cent in females and 1.0 per cent in males). In states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar

Table 7 *Percentage Distribution of Population by Marital Status and Age Groups*

Age Group	Male		Female	
	Currently married	widowed	Currently married	widow
10-14	2.6	0.02	6.6	0.03
15-19	12.3	0.1	43.4	0.2
20-24	43.1	0.4	88.4	0.7
25-29	77.2	0.8	94.3	1.5
30-34	91.1	1.3	94.8	3.1
35-39	94.2	2.0	93.2	5.4
40-44	93.5	3.3	87.8	10.9
45-49	92.8	4.5	82.9	16.0
50-54	89.9	7.3	69.2	29.7
55-59	88.6	9.0	67.3	31.8
60-64	83.3	14.1	43.1	56.1
65-69	83.3	17.2	40.6	58.6
70 +	70.4	27.0	21.7	77.6
All ages	42.0	2.4	45.2	8.1

Source: Census of India, 1981, Series-1, India, Part-II-Special, p. 33.



Pradesh and Bihar the percentage of females married in the age group of 10-14 is more than 10 per cent. This proportion is negligible in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In the age group 15-44, the proportion of married females is 80.5 per cent. It again varies from 60.7 per cent in Kerala to 88.6 per cent in Bihar.<sup>10</sup> In all the age groups, the percentage of the widowed is much higher among females than in the males. Upto the age of 29, the incidence of the widowed amongst females is nearly twice that of males. In the subsequent age groups i.e. 30 years and above, the gender disparity in the incidence of the widowed becomes three-folds or more. The mean age at marriage for females is much lower i.e. 18.3 years, than of the males that is 23.3 years. It is highest in Kerala that is 22.0 years for females and 27.2 years for males.<sup>11</sup>

#### Educational Level:

13 The high incidence of illiteracy amongst females constitutes one of the greatest barriers to their development. It limits their scope of employment, training, utilisation of health facilities and exercise of legal and constitutional rights. There are scores of studies which show the positive correlations of female literacy with socio-economic and demographic indices. In a recent study of the Census data, Sharma and Retherford (1987) have listed several such positive correlations. Some of these are: (i) "female literacy is strongly and positively related with mean age at marriage"; (ii) "female literacy rate is moderately and positively related with female employment in non-agricultural and non-household industry"; (iii) "female literacy is strongly and negatively related with (a) infant mortality rate, (b) per cent married females aged 15-44, (c) crude birth rate, and (d) total fertility rate" (Occasional Paper No. 1 of 1987, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India: 44). Despite high priority attached to education in our plans, the study observes that the increase in literacy rate has not been "fast enough to keep illiterates from increasing in absolute number." The number of female illiterates has been increasing at a faster pace than of the males.<sup>12</sup>

14 The Seventh Plan document observes that: "nearly 73 per cent total non-enrolled children in the 6-11 years age group were girls."<sup>13</sup> The all-India female literacy rate, according to the 1981 Census is barely 24.8 per cent as against 46.9 per cent for males. During the post-independence period, the total number of illiterate women in absolute number has

Table 8. Literacy in India, 1901-1981

Years	Percentage of Literates to total population		
	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	25.0	7.9
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8

Source: (i) Census of India 1981, Series-1, India Paper 2 of 1983, p. 15.

(ii) Sharma O.P. & Retherford Robert D., Recent Literacy Trends in India, Census of India, Occasional Paper No. 1 of 1987, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, pp. 7, 16.

increased from 161.9 million in 1951 to a staggering figure of 241.6 million in 1981. The sex ratio of illiterates has gone up from 1138 in 1951 to 1322 in 1981.

Table 9. Literacy rate and Enrolment Ratios 1981

Educational Level/ Age Group	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Literacy Rate	40.8	18.0	65.8	47.8
Percentage of schoolgoing children				
Age group 5-9	39.6	25.8	61.7	55.6
Age group 10-14	57.8	29.2	77.0	65.6

Source: Census of India, 1981 Series-1, India Part-II-Special, pp. 78, 92.

15 In the rural areas gender disparities in the literacy rates, are greater than in the urban areas. It is also observed that the gender differences in literacy rates tend to diminish with urbanisation as inter and intra regional disparities in female literacy rates are far higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In rural areas, the female literacy rates range from 1.6 per cent in Jaisalmar district in Rajasthan to 79.0 per cent in Kottayam district in Kerala. There are several rural areas where the female literacy rate amongst the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is near zero. Nearly one-third of the total districts in the country have rural female literacy rates of around 10 per cent or less. In states like Rajasthan, all the 26 districts have rural female literacy rates around 5 per cent or less. In Madhya Pradesh 29 out of 45 districts (i.e. 64 per cent of total number of districts) have rural female literacy rates of less than 10 per cent. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, about 50 per cent of the districts have rural female literacy rates of less than 10 per cent. The percentage of non-enrolled female children in the age group of 5 to 14 years in rural areas is still as high as over 70 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

Table 10. Enrolment Ratio amongst Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1985

	Enrolment Ratio		Sex Ratio
	Boys	Girls	
Scheduled Castes			
Primary	116.6	73.2	595
Middle	57.8	26.2	426
Scheduled Tribes			
Primary	113.2	68.8	576
Middle	41.3	19.2	436
Other Communities			
Primary	108.8	77.1	699
Middle	65.0	38.1	580

Source: Based on Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, Selected Educational Statistics, pp. 42-49, 1985-86.

16 Both qualitatively and quantitatively, women's access to education is far less than men's. The crude enrolment ratios for females are much lower than the males. Their relative share falls sharply as one moves from the primary to the middle and higher levels of education. This sets up a chain effect, adversely influencing their status and opportunities for

Table 11. Age Specific Literacy Rate, 1981

Age Group	Literacy Rate	
	Male	Female
5-9	35.1	25.8
10-14	66.9	44.8
15-19	66.1	43.3
20-24	66.5	37.2
25-34	60.7	29.0
35 +	44.6	14.4

Source: Sharma O.P. & Retherford R.D., 1987, op. cit., p. 11.

employment and training in general.

17 The education specific gender disparities are more pronounced amongst the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The sex ratio at primary/middle and higher secondary levels amongst the Scheduled Castes are 595, 426 and 246 respectively and amongst the scheduled tribes as 576, 436 and 248 respectively<sup>15</sup>. For all communities, the sex ratio at the primary stage is 671. This declines to 455 at the high and higher secondary stage and further to 331 at the degree and above levels.

18 The enrolment of women in vocational and professional courses continues to be very low. Although women are making some entry in this field, they are generally confined to the

Table 12. Sex-Ratio by Educational Level, 1985

Educational Level	(Enrolment in '000)		
	Boys	Girls	Sex Ratio
Primary	51732	34733	671
Middle	18132	9992	551
Higher Secondary	10427	4070	390
Pre-University Intermediate Pre-degree	1382	482	349
Teachers Training School	47	51	1085
Technical and Industrial Arts and Craft School	217	66	304
Polytechnique	112	12	107
B.Ed./B.T.	48	37	771
MBBS	56	24	429
B.Ed., B.Sc. (Engg.), B.Arch.	135	9	66
B.Com.	598	158	264
B.Sc.	452	192	425
B.A.	799	488	611
M.Com.	54	12	222
M.Sc.	53	26	491
M.A.	113	70	619
Ph.D./D.Sc/D.Phil.	20	9	450

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, Selected Educational Statistics, 1985-86, pp.16-30.

teacher training courses. The sex ratio in teacher training schools is as high as 1085. At B.Ed./B.T. level it is 771. The sex ratios in polytechniques and in M.Com. are barely 107 and 222 respectively. Female enrolment in technical and industrial arts and craft schools is rather low as is evident from the low sex ratio, i.e. 304.

19 The slow growth of literacy, rate particularly amongst females is a highly disturbing phenomenon. Sharma and Retherford have projected, at the existing rate, it may take about seven decades or more for the country to reach the goal of full literacy or universalisation of education in the age group of 5-14 years. Some states like Kerala may reach this goal in 1.5 decades while other like Rajasthan may require more than a century. Urban areas may take about 5.5 decades and rural areas over 9 decades to reach "full literacy". At the current rate, in the case of females, universal literacy is not likely to be reached before nine decades and states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh may take anything from 14 to 25 decades<sup>16</sup>.

#### Migration:

Women's plight is further affected by migration which is often thrust upon them by a host of social and cultural factors. The incidence of migration among the females (within the country) is far greater than among the males. According to the 1981 Census, out of the total of 201.8 million migrants, the number of female migrants was as high as 141.8 million. The percentage of migrants among the males was only 18.0 per cent, as against 44.2 per cent amongst the females. The migration amongst females is largely confined within the district whereas the proportion of males migrating outside the districts as well as the state is relatively much higher than the females. As many as 65.1 per cent of females migrated within the districts of their birth as against 46.0 per cent of males. The proportion of migrants who migrated to other districts of the state amongst males is 28.8 per cent as against 23.4 per cent amongst females. The main cause of migration amongst females is marriage (73.3 per cent). Only about three per cent of females have reported employment and education as the main cause of migration.

21 The flow of migration consists of four streams, viz. rural to urban, urban to rural and

Table 13. Migrants Classified by Sex and Reasons for Migration (Figures in million)

Reasons for migration	Total		Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Employment	19.1 (31.9)	2.7 (1.9)	13.2 (29.9)	1.9 (1.6)	5.9 (37.3)	0.8 (3.9)
Education	3.2 (5.3)	1.3 (0.9)	2.5 (5.7)	0.9 (0.7)	0.7 (4.4)	0.4 (1.9)
Shifting of families	18.2 (30.4)	20.2 (14.3)	13.2 (29.9)	14.0 (11.6)	5.0 (31.7)	6.2 (30.1)
Marriage	1.9 (3.2)	104.0 (73.3)	1.7 (3.9)	93.8 (77.4)	0.2 (1.3)	10.2 (49.5)
Others	17.5 (29.2)	13.6 (9.6)	13.5 (30.6)	10.6 (8.7)	(4.0) (25.3)	3.0 (14.6)
Total	59.9 (100.0)	141.8 (100.0)	44.1 (100.0)	121.2 (100.0)	15.8 (100.0)	20.6 (100.0)

Source: Census of India, 1981, Series-1, India, Part-II, Special, op. cit., pp. 250-251.

urban to urban. Out of a total of 129.5 million female intra state migration, 76.6 per cent was rural to rural, 7.1 per cent urban to urban, 10.9 per cent rural to urban and 5.2 per cent urban to rural. The inter state migration amongst females was of the order of 12.5 million. Out of these 37.6 per cent migrated within the rural areas, 28.1 per cent urban to urban, 25.9 per cent rural to urban and 7.6 per cent urban to rural. During 1971-81 the rural migration declined, whereas, urban to urban and rural to urban gained significant increase. Thus during 1971-81, there has been a downward shift in the case of rural to rural migration and an upward shift in rural to urban and urban to urban migration.

Table 14. Distribution of Migrants Reporting Employment as Reason for Migration by Worker Status, 1981. (Figures in million)

Worker status	Persons	Males	Females
Total	22.2 (100)	19.4 (100)	2.8 (100)
Main workers	19.0 (85.4)	17.8 (91.3)	1.2 (43.9)
Marginal workers	0.2 (1.03)	0.1 (0.7)	0.1 (3.6)
Non-workers	3.0 (13.58)	1.6 (8.0)	1.5 (52.5)
Seeking/Available for work	0.4 (1.9)	0.3 (1.7)	0.1 (2.6)

Source: Census of India, 1981, Series-I, India, Part-II Special, op. cit., pp. 74.

22 A study of the existing work status of migrants, who reported employment as the main reason for migration, shows that women are far worse placed than men. Out of a total of 22.2 million persons reporting employment as the main reason for migration, only 2.7 million persons i.e. 12.6 per cent were females, the rest, i.e. 19.4 million, were males. Again among the female migrant workers reporting employment as the main reason for migration, only 43.9 per cent were main workers; 3.6 per cent were marginal workers and the rest i.e. 52.5 per cent were non-workers. The corresponding figures for male migrant workers are 91.3, 0.7 and 8.0 per cent respectively.

## II. Economic Profile

### Concepts and Data Base:

23 The conceptual and data base pertaining to the economic profile of the socially unprotected workers forms the weakest link in labour statistics. The conventional classification of workers and their contribution to the economy reduces the poor labouring women as marginal workers with little contribution to the national economy and thus reduces them into total invisibility.

24 Broadly speaking, the unprotected workers include all those who are outside the pale of the organised sector. By the nature of their activities, they can be classified under the following broad categories:—

- (i) Home-based producers including artisans and piece-rate workers, paid and unpaid family labourers;

- (ii) Petty vendors and hawkers who do not hire labour but take the assistance of family members;
- (iii) Contract labour and sub-contract labour.
- (iv) Providers of services like washer-women, scavengers, domestic helpers;
- (v) Women engaged in processing work in traditional and non-traditional areas;
- (vi) Those doing manual work like construction labour and those working in agriculture and other primary sectors.

On the basis of the employment status, the aforesaid groups can be classified under three broad categories viz.:

- (i) Self-employed.
- (ii) Wage earners working outside homes (agricultural workers, construction workers, contract and sub-contract workers etc.) and inside homes (home based workers working on putting out basis), and
- (iii) Unpaid family helpers.

25 The scanty data available on the unprotected worker is mainly drawn from the Census, the National Sample Survey Organisation, Central and State Government departments, various Boards/Commissions, the Handloom and Handicraft Board, the Fisheries Board, the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, reports of semi government and semi official agencies and sectoral and micro level studies conducted by scholars.

26 The data on workers from various Central and State Government departments, semi-governments and official agencies is frequently incomplete and lacking in details. It also



As a plantation worker, her wages are low & discriminatory.

does not give separate information about female workers. The micro level studies do throw some useful light on the working and living conditions of female workers but these studies are seldom carried out on a regular basis.

27 Both the major sources of data, the Census of India and the NSSO differ in their approach in measuring the work force. In the Census enquiries of 1971 and 1981, a person who has worked for major part of the year (not less than 183 days) is regarded as a main worker, and if the person has worked for a fewer number of days, he/she is regarded as a marginal worker. The NSSO, on the other hand, has a more elaborate categorisation. It defines three distinct working statuses viz, usual status, current weekly status and current daily status comprising 22 activity categories (from 01 to 99), where 01-71 are for workers (01-51 for usual status and 61-71 for current status), 81-82 are for those seeking and/or available for work (unemployed), and 91-99 are for those not in labour force. The NSS categorisation makes it possible to assess the employment status of workers in various categories like self-employed casual workers, family helpers, regular salaried workers, and unemployed.<sup>17</sup>

28 Under usual status the reference period of ascertaining one's working status covers 365 days preceding the date of survey whereas under the current weekly status the reference period covers seven days preceding the date of survey and the current daily status is with reference to each day of the seven days preceding the date of survey. The disparity between the usual and current daily status gives an idea about the intensity of employment. In the present analysis the concepts and terms as adopted by the official agencies like the Census and the NSSO have been retained.

#### Women as Workers:

29 Poor women are invisible workers. The invisibility is thrust upon them by confining them to the so called subordinate roles. The statistics thus collected, even by the official agencies, largely categorizes them as non-workers. They are classed as the weaker sex, confined to strenuous and monotonous work and withdraw voluntarily from the labour force as and when the situation so demands.<sup>18</sup>

30 The accounting of females as workers in the Census and the NSSO suffers from serious enumerational and reporting drawbacks. According to Mitra,<sup>19</sup> the under-reporting of female work force participation rates in the Census varies from 30 to 40 per cent. He estimates that the participation of females in the informal sector is as high as 49 per cent as against 15 to 17 per cent in the case of males. Jain and Chand<sup>20</sup> find that the measurement of female labour force participation and analysis suffer from gross "under enumeration, inadequate attention to unpaid family labour, own production and household work and relationship between them..." "There are poor conceptualizations of female work styles, mistaken perception of females economic roles by respondents and interviewers." The statistical information is generally collected through male interviewers.

31 In the 1981 Census, the work force participation rate amongst females was barely 14.0 per cent (main workers) as against 51.6 per cent amongst males. The NSSO Thirty Eighth Round (1983) records female work force participation rate on a higher side i.e., as 21.9 per cent in the case of main workers and 29.6 per cent with main and marginal workers.

32 The activity profile of poor female workers presents a complex picture. Poor female workers, on account of the high incidence of casualisation, intermittency of work and erratic availability of work are generally engaged in a multiplicity of activities. Along with the multiplicity of activities, they are confronted with multiple employment status which varies from unpaid family work to wage labour outside the home, contract/piece rate work, independent work and rendering of services in exchange of goods and services.



33 There are a number of studies to show that women work for longer hours and contribute more than men in terms of total labour energy spent by the household members. On account of deeply entrenched social customs, taboos and prejudices, women's work continues to be invisible and confined more to non-monetary activities. "It has been observed that the average hours of unpaid work done by married women outside the home varied from 6.13 to 7.53 hours per day, some of them working more than 10 hours each day. Apart from domestic duties, women engaged in agricultural operations work on an average about 12 hours on the farm and in taking care of cattle at home."<sup>21</sup>

34 The female labour force is further characterised by poor occupational diversification. According to the 1981 Census as many as 79.4 per cent of female workers are engaged in agricultural activities mainly as agricultural labourers. In rural areas other activities in which women are mainly concentrated include livestock production, fisheries, forestry and in household industries. In urban areas, the household industries and other service sector account for the largest proportion of women workers. They are mainly concentrated in traditional occupations.

35 Again as workers, an overwhelming proportion of women i.e. 93 per cent or more, are engaged in the unorganised informal sector mainly as self-employed, wage earners, non-wage or casual workers. Female workers suffer from high incidence of casualisation. The incidence of casual wage earners in agricultural and construction work amongst females, ranges, from 75 per cent to 96 per cent of the total female wage earners. The wage offered to them for the same work is generally one half or less than that of males.<sup>22</sup> As a self-employed worker they work for longer hours with little or no fixed capital or working capital having no fixed place to work, vending in open space with no protection from existing labour legislations.

#### Contribution to Family Income:

36 There are a host of conceptual and methodological problems involved in measuring the economic contribution of women. The data in this sphere is inadequate and grossly under-estimate their contribution to family income. Poor women are mainly engaged as self-employed workers largely in home-based activities where their work at home intermixes with their household duties and the productivity of their work as well as their status as worker is invisible. Women are undoubtedly engaged in several activities which add to household incomes but are totally outside the sphere of the market economy. There are numerous activities like free collection of fodder and fuel, maintaining of dairy, poultry and animals, vegetable growing, food processing, sewing, weaving etc. in which women are engaged and increase the "household's command over the necessities". The household would have to spend a lot of money in procuring these services, if they were not rendered by women.

37 The NSSO activity code 93 enumerates persons who are outside the conventional labour force and work on operations which increase the household command over necessities. The activities include domestic duties along with free collection of goods like vegetables, roots, firewood and cattle feed, sewing, tailoring, weaving for household use and fetching water, poultry, maintenance of kitchen garden. If the proportion of women engaged in these activities is added to the conventional workforce participation rate, the extended workforce participation rate of women increases markedly and gets much closer to that of males. Unfortunately, there is hardly any exercise to measure the monetary contribution of various activities carried out by females in activity category 93.

38 An analysis of variables influencing women's participation in domestic duties along with free collection of goods for household as made by Geeta and Charanjeet Singh is highly revealing<sup>23</sup>. They find that women's involvement in these activities is positively related to their

access to assets. The overall relationship between possession of land and proportion of women participating in activity category 93 is somewhat inverted 'U' shaped. The participation of women in these home-based activities increases as the size of land holding increases and it is only when the size of land holdings exceeds 7.5 acres, it starts flagging. The participation of women engaged in free collection of goods like firewood, fodder declines sharply as the size of family land holdings increases and the participation in activities like dairying, poultry, sewing increases as the household asset level increases.

39 It is clear that the high proportion of women engaged in activity category 93 is mainly because these activities provide the opportunity for combining household duties with productive work. Under the present socio-cultural pressures women are burdened with heavy domestic duties and child care. A large majority of them try to add something to the family's real income by engaging themselves in market oriented or non-market oriented household activities. The heavy burden on women in self-employment under activity category 93 is a convenient way of coping with the shortage of job opportunities and mounting household duties.

40 The quantitative contribution of poor females to their family income is not only highly significant but the qualitative contribution is also of immense value to their families. Unlike the males who spend a portion of their earnings on themselves, the poor female workers hardly spend anything on themselves. Their entire earnings are spend on the up-bringing and the betterment of the family members.<sup>24</sup>

#### Contribution to National Income:

41 The National Income Statistics of the CSO do not provide information on factor income in terms of average compensation paid to employees in different sectors of economy



She is involved in various processes of fishing industry.

for males and females separately. Some estimates about the contribution of females to the national income can be arrived at on the basis of the estimates of female workers in different sectors and the average daily earnings of workers as available with the NSSO. [The information as available on factor income generated from various sectors of working populations i.e. wage and salary earners in the organized and unorganized sectors and self-employed workers, does throw some light on the contribution of the unprotected workers in the unorganized sector to national income.

42 By and large almost all the female workers belong to the unprotected, self-employed and unorganized sector, where earnings are extremely low. There are glaring differences in average earnings per worker in the organized and unorganized sectors. The per woman earnings of workers in organized sector in 1981 has been estimated at Rs. 11555 (963 per month), as against Rs. 2720 (227 per month) for workers in unorganized sector (Mehta 1987).<sup>25</sup> The earnings of workers in unprotected unorganized sectors are thus one fourth of earnings of the workers in the organized sector. The earnings of self-employed workers are estimated at Rs. 3062 per annum (Rs. 255 per month). It is a common knowledge that the unprotected female workers in the unorganised sector receive wages which are less than half of the wages of males, and the earnings of self employed females are still more depressed. The proportion of females constituting the work-force even by the NSS definition does not exceed 30 per cent of total female population. It is, therefore, no wonder that the contribution of females, in the national income works out to be barely 10 to 15 per cent.

43 Banerjee (1988) attempted to assess factor income of female workers by the nature of their employment on the basis of the data available in the Thirty Eighth Round of NSS (1983) with two sets of assumptions.<sup>26</sup> One assumption is that all the female workers worked on all the days of the year and their earnings are computed on the basis of the earning structure as prevailing for the regular wage and salaried workers in specific industrial categories. The other assumption is that the opportunity cost of the self employed workers is the same as the average earnings of the casual labourer in a given locality/industry and if self-employment is

Table 15. Factor Income of Female Workers by Activity Status and Sector, 1983  
(Rupees in crores)

Sector	Self Employed	Regular Salaries	Casual Labour	All Sectors
<b>Rural</b>				
Agriculture	5515	244	2720	8479
Non-Agriculture	926	619	503	2048
All Sectors	6441	863	3233	10527
<b>Urban</b>				
Agriculture	216	12	125	353
Non-Agriculture	490	1917	292	2699
All Sectors	706	1929	417	3052
<b>All Sector</b>				
Agriculture	5731	256	2845	8832
Non-Agriculture	1416	2536	795	4747
All Sectors	7147	2792	3640	13579

Source: Banerjee N., Some Recent Trends in the Economic Activities of Indian Women, NCSEW, 1988.

not possible, the casual labour is the other alternative available to poor female workers for making a living. The first assumption leads to over-estimation of the contribution of women to the national income whereas the second assumption sets somewhat lower limit of the assessment of the contribution of women in national income. On the basis of both these assumptions, the share of women in national income works out to be 16.9 per cent and 14.4 per cent respectively. The national income at factor cost in 1983 is estimated at Rs. 1,35,000 crores.

44 Even the low estimates according to Banerjee are an over-estimation of the contribution of women to national income as the earnings of home-based, self-employed female workers are lower than the casual labourers. It is high time to harness the potential of poor labouring women and work relentlessly to give them dignity and equality in the economic sphere.

### Activity Status: Emerging Trends

45 Female Workforce Participation Rate: The measurement of female workforce participation rate is a difficult exercise. Changes in definitions and concepts makes comparison of data from the different official sources and even from the same official sources, over a period of time, and difficult. The female workforce participation rate as estimated in the 1981 Census, even taking into consideration the marginal workers, appears to be highly depressed. According to the 1981 Census, out of a total of 222.5 million main workers and 22.1 million marginal workers, the share of female main worker was 20.2 per cent (45.0 million) and of marginal workers as 84.0 per cent (18.6 million). Thus female workers constituted about one fourth of total work force in the economy. The workforce participation rate (WFPR) for females (main + marginal workers) works out to be 20.3 per cent (23.2 per cent rural areas and 8.3 per cent in urban areas).

46 The female workforce participation rates (main workers) in both rural and urban areas are much lower than the males. On the whole, female workforce participation rate (main workers) as recorded in the 1981 Census is 3.25 times less than that of the males. In urban areas male workforce participation rate (main workers) is about seven times higher than that of the females. The data collected by NSSO surveys are on the other hand conceptually superior and are also more or less comparable over the last three quinquennial surveys. The WFPR for females according to 1983 NSSO survey are higher than those shown by the Census for females and the disparities between male and female rates are also much less (Table 16)

Table 16. Workforce Participation rate (Main workers) 1981 Census and Thirty Eighth Round of NSS 1983.

	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
1981 Census			
Rural	52.6	16.0	289
Urban	48.5	7.3	132
Total	51.6	14.0	253
Thirty Eighth Round of NSS (1983)			
Rural	52.8	24.8	453
Urban	50.0	12.1	218
Total	52.1	21.9	398

Source: Based on (i) Census of India, Series-1, India Part-II-Special, op. cit., p. 2.  
(ii) NSSO, Thirty Eighth Round (Jan-Dec., 1983), No. 341, p. 16.

### Incidence of Intermittency of Work:

47 The estimated number of workers (usual status, main+marginal) by the Thirty Eighth Round of NSSO (1983), works out to be 287.3 million workers of whom 98.4 million are females. The work participation rate (all ages) for males and females are 53.8 and 29.6 respectively. There is a marked disparity in the work participation rate of females estimated in usual status and current day status basis by the NSSO. This is because all those recorded as workers on usual status basis may not find work on an average day, whereas the work participation rates (main+marginal workers of age 5 years and above) in rural areas for females as 39.3 on usual status basis and 22.9 on daily status basis. The comparative figures for males are 63.5 and 55.9. (Table 17).

Table 17. Work Participation Rate (Principal + Subsidiary Status) Age 5 years and above, 1983

Category of worker	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Usual Status	63.5	39.3	58.1	17.3
Daily Status	55.9	22.9	53.7	12.2

Source: NSSO, op. cit., pp. 36-55.

### Participation in Domestic Duties and Free Collection of Goods for Household Use (NSS activity Code Status-93):

48 The proportion of females engaged in domestic duties along with the free collection of goods (vegetables, roots, firewood, cattle food), sewing, tailoring, weaving for households use, is several times more than males. In rural areas, about 12.2 per cent of female population over five years is engaged in these activities as against barely 0.6 per cent in the case of males. This represents a sizeable section of the population and their absolute number is nearly half of the total female work force. If this category of population is added to the work force, the work force participation rates becomes much closer to males. Again this percentage varies markedly from State to State. It ranges from 0.8 per cent in Goa, Daman and Diu to around 30 per cent in Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and Mizoram. It is worth noting that States having higher work force participation rates (above national average) have a lower percentage of population engaged in these activities

49 Activity code status 92 i.e. persons attending domestic duties only, accounts for over 30 per cent of the females in rural areas (Table 18). In urban areas the proportion of females participating in activity code 92 (i.e. attending domestic duties only) and activity code 93 (i.e. attending domestic duties along with free collection of goods) is far higher (i.e. 50.5 per cent) than in the rural areas (42.0 per cent). Some prominent activities in which females attending household duties in rural areas are engaged in include: (i) fetching water from outside household premises (63 per cent), (ii) preparation of cowdung cakes for use as fuel (49.9 per cent), (iii) grinding of foodgrains (36.8 per cent), (iv) household dairy (31.8 per cent), (v) sewing and tailoring (17.4 per cent), (vi) household poultry (14.5 per cent), (vii) maintenance of kitchen garden, orchards (14.4 per cent). In urban areas, the corresponding figures are: (i) bringing water from outside household premises (38.4 per cent), (ii) sewing and tailoring (20.8 per cent), and (iii) grinding of foodgrains (13.5 per cent).

Table 18. Percentage of Females 5 years and above, engaged in Household Duties and also Participated in Specified Activities to total Females engaged in Household Duties, 1983

S.No.	Activities	Rural	Urban
1.	Maintenance of kitchen garden, orchards, etc.	14.4	4.6
2.	Work in household poultry	14.5	3.9
3.	Work in household dairy	31.8	6.0
4.	Any of the activity 1.3	43.7	11.7
5.	Free collection of fish, Small game, etc.	24.1	3.1
6.	Free collection of firewood, cattle feed, etc.	43.5	8.0
7.	Any of the activity 1.5	65.1	17.2
8.	Husking paddy	27.6	2.3
9.	Preparation of gur	2.2	0.2
10.	Grinding of foodgrains	38.8	13.5
11.	Preparation of cow dung cakes for use as fuel	49.9	9.1
12.	Sewing, tailoring	17.4	20.8
13.	Tutoring of children	3.4	10.0
14.	Bringing water from outside the household premise	63.0	34.8
15.	Bringing water from outside the village	3.3	—
16.	Percentage of persons engaged in household duties to total persons (5+)	42.0	50.5

Source: NSSO, 1987 op. cit., p. 93.

#### Self-Employed Workers:

50 Self-employment, by and large, constitutes the dominant sector of employment in our economy. This sector is characterised by "easy entry" and "less waiting time", where choice of activity is mainly guided by association of other members of the family in a particular activity or their "previous experiences" and "acquaintances". Most of the activities involve no capital or little capital. The capital requirement, either of fixed or working capital, is almost entirely met from family and informal sources. This sector, thus, by and large, generates its own capital. This sector is also characterised by almost unrestricted working hours.

51 According to the Thirty Eighth Round of the NSSO over 164.7 million workers (principal + marginal workers by usual status in the age group 5 years and above), constituting 57.3 per cent of the total work force, are absorbed in this sector. Out of a total of 98.4 million female workers as many as 59.1 million (60.1 per cent) are engaged as self-employed workers, the percentage being somewhat higher than for males (55.9 per cent). The proportion of females engaged as self-employed workers in the rural areas is much higher (61.9 per cent) than in the urban areas (45.8 per cent). The percentage of female self-employed workers in agriculture is higher (i.e. 65.0 per cent males and 63.5 per cent females in rural areas) than amongst the non-agricultural workers (50.0 per cent males and 46.1 per cent females in rural areas).

Table 19. Self-Employed Workers (Principal + Subsidiary) Usual Status, 1983.

(figures in million)

	Male	Female	Total
Rural	87.8	53.8	141.6
Urban	17.8	5.3	23.1
Total	105.6	59.1	164.7

Source: NSSO, 1987, op. cit., pp. 16, 294, 295.

Table 20. Percentage Distribution of usually Employed Persons of Age 5 years and above by Category of Employment, 1983

Nature/Category of Employment	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Principal Usual Status				
Self-employment	59.50	54.12	40.21	37.28
Regular employment	10.64	3.69	44.51	31.76
Casual Labour	29.86	42.19	15.28	30.96
Subsidiary Status				
Self Employment	88.48	85.54	73.81	82.18
Regular employment	1.13	0.41	8.22	2.42
Casual Labour	10.39	14.05	17.97	15.40
Principal + Subsidiary Status				
Self Employment	60.44	61.93	40.89	45.80
	(65.90)	(64.48)	(39.25)	(48.40)
Regular-Employment	10.32	2.80	43.70	25.80
	(12.06)	(4.08)	(50.69)	(27.89)
Casual labour	29.24	35.27	15.41	28.40
	(22.04)	(31.44)	(10.06)	(23.71)

Note: Figures in parentheses refer to Twenty Seventh Round (1972-73).

Source: Servekshana, 1986, Vol. IX, No. 4, S. 112.

NSSO: 38th Round, January—December, 1983. No. 341, 1987, pp. 50/6.

52. It is observed that the incidence of self-employment amongst the female marginal (subsidiary status) workers, in both the rural and the urban areas, is far higher than amongst the main workers. i.e. 85.5 per cent in rural areas and 82.2 per cent in urban areas. The rural-urban disparities in the proportion of self-employed workers (subsidiary status) is, much less than in the case of main workers. A comparison of the percentage distribution of female workers by the nature of employment during the twentyseventh Round (1972-73) and thiryeighth Round (1983) of the NSSO reveals that during this decade the proportion of self-employed workers, as well as the workers in regular wage occupation registered a noticeable decline a trend seen in the case of males too. The total percentage of self-employed workers to total workers in the household enterprises in the case of males, is 46.1 as against 18.7 per cent in the case of females. On the other hand, the proportion of male workers working as helpers in household enterprises is 13.4 per cent as against 36.1 per cent

in the case of females.

53. Incidence of Wage Labour and Casualization: The proportion of female wage labour in the work force is far lower than that of males. Only 38 per cent of female workers in rural areas are wage earners. In urban areas, however, the percentage of female wage workers to total workers is 53.3 per cent. The percentage of female wage labour in female work force, engaged in agriculture is slightly higher (36.5 per cent in rural areas) than the males (35.0 per cent in rural areas). In the wage sector women are mostly engaged as casual labourers. The incidence of casual labour amongst female wage earners is much higher than in the males, in both the rural and urban areas, as well as in agriculture and non-agriculture occupations. In rural areas, this incidence is rather alarming. It is as high as 92.1 per cent amongst females as against 74.1 per cent amongst males. A study of the NSSO data for 1972-83 shows that during this period, in rural areas, the incidence of casual labour among females increased by about 4 percentage points i.e. from 88.5 per cent in 1972-73 to 92.1 per cent in 1983. Again the state-wise variation in the incidence of casual labour are more pronounced amongst female workers than amongst males. The percentage of casual labour in female work force varies from 14.5 per cent in Mizoram to 97.1 per cent in Maharashtra followed by 96.5 per cent in Bihar, 95.9 per cent in Karnataka, 94.4 per cent in Andhra Pradesh and 93.8 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. For women workers engaged in agriculture, this percentage in some states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Mizoram is as high as 98 per cent or more.<sup>27</sup>

Table 21. Incidence of Casual Labour (Usual Status), 1983

Rural/Urban	Percentage of Casual Wage earners to total wage earners.	
	Male	Female
Total Rural	74.1	92.1
Agrarian-Rural	87.0	96.4
Non-Agriculture	40.5	62.7
Total Urban	24.9	51.1
Non-agrarian-Urban	22.0	41.6

Source: Kalpagam U, Womens' in Labour Force, Analysis of NSS Data, 1987, pp. 94, 111, 123, 201, 220

#### Wage Discrimination:

54 The gender disparities in earnings as revealed in the NSSO or Rural Labour Enquiry Reports, are glaring. One may draw the following inferences from the study of wage tables of Thirty Eighth Round of NSSO.

(i) The average earnings of female casual labourers are highly depressed. The disparity in the earnings of regular wage/salaried employees and casual wage labourers in the case of females are far more pronounced than of the males in both the rural and urban areas. In the urban areas, the average earning of regular wage/salaried female employees is about three times higher than of the female casual labourers.

(ii) The gender disparities in earnings are more pronounced in rural areas than in the urban areas.

(iii) The gender disparities in earnings are far greater amongst the casual wage labourers,



where female earnings are less than half of the males earnings. In rural areas, the earnings of female casual wage labourers, average around Rs. 4.49 as against 10.27 in the case of males. The corresponding figures for regular wage/salaried employees are Rs. 10.11 for the females and Rs. 15.04 for the males.

(iv) In both the rural and urban areas, and amongst regular wage earners as well as casual wage earners, the gender disparities in earnings increase with the age group of the workers. In the age group 60+, the average earnings record a steep fall. The fall is much more severe in the case of female workers than in the males. In the case of female workers the average wage earnings become almost equal to the average wage earnings of the child workers.

(v) A child worker in regular wage/salaried employment receives nearly one fourth of the average adult wages. Amongst casual workers this disparity is much less. It may also be noted that the disparities in the wages of female child workers in both regular and casual wage sectors, in the rural and urban areas is less pronounced than the male child workers.

Table 22. Average Wage Salary Earnings Per Day, 1983

(in Rupees)

Age group	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Regular Wage/Salaried Employees</b>				
5-14	4.33	4.20	4.77	4.49
15-59	16.09	10.85	23.72	17.36
60+	9.21	4.30	17.65	7.99
All Ages	15.04	10.11	23.30	16.86
<b>Casual Wage Labourer</b>				
5-14	5.68	3.57	5.19	3.50
15-59	10.53	5.11	11.89	5.30
60+	9.35	3.77	9.94	4.65
All Ages	10.27	4.89	11.09	5.29

Source: NSSO, 1987, op. cit., pp. 337, 338.

55 There is another aspect of wage discrimination which needs serious attention. It is observed that female workers "are exploited as a piece-rate worker doing manual labour for trader, middlemen, contractors and big companies in the corporate sector." "There is variation in the wages for identical work and skills". "Self-employed workers accept wage rate which patently do not cover their cost. It is difficult to understand why and how the difference exists and why workers accept them." "In any case a significant chunk" of self-employed workers "is engaged in providing cheap labour intensive services to the rich."<sup>28</sup>

#### Incidence of Unemployment and Under-employment:

56 In both rural and urban areas, as a percentage of labour force, the unemployment rates for females are generally much higher than of the males. In the case of females in rural areas, these rates particularly by current daily status, are several times more than of the usual status. For instance, in the Thirty Eighth Round, according to the usual status, the female unemployment rate works out to be 1.41, whereas according to the daily status, this is 8.8 in rural areas. In urban areas according to daily status, the incidence of unemployment amongst female is as high as 10.9 as against 9.23 males. The usually high

difference in the unemployment rates estimated according to the usual status and the daily status reflect the greater incidence of casual work.

Table 23. Incidence of Unemployment, 1983

	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Usual Status	2.12	1.41	5.86	6.90
Weekly Status	3.72	4.26	8.69	7.46
Daily Status	7.52	8.98	9.23	10.99

Source: NSSO, 1987, op. cit., p. 79

Table 24. Percentage Distribution of Females (5 years and above) Usually engaged in Household Duties and Willing to Accept Work at their Residence by Type of Work Acceptable, 1983.

Type of work acceptable	Rural	Urban
Dairy	32.65	15.23
Poultry	10.91	7.91
Other animal husbandry	11.12	3.01
Spinning and weaving	16.68	15.25
Manufacturing wood and cane products	0.94	1.81
Tailoring	20.17	40.16
Leather goods manufacturing and repairing	0.23	0.72
Others	7.30	15.91
Total	100.00	100.00
Percentage of females willing to accept work to total females engaged in household duties	24.46	21.93
Percentage of females engaged in household duties to total females	42.00	50.50

Source: NSSO, 1987, op. cit., p. 95.

57 Again there are marked statewise variations in the female unemployment rates. It varies from 0.7 per cent in Himachal Pradesh to 39.4 per cent in Tripura, followed by 31.12 per cent in Kerala, 30.1 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and Pondicherry, and 26 per cent in West Bengal. The variation in the incidence of unemployment, in the case of males, is much less pronounced as it varies from 1.0 per cent in Manipur to 24.8 per cent in Kerala<sup>29</sup>.

58 The NSSO Thirty Eighth Round also furnishes some estimates of the under-employment. It is observed that in rural areas about 18 per cent of the usually employed females were under-employed (i.e., available for additional work). The corresponding proportion in urban areas was 15 per cent. Under-employment is the highest among the casual labourers, particularly among those usually engaged in agricultural activities.

59 The incidence of under-employment among female casual wage workers in agriculture was 33.1 per cent. Even amongst the females engaged in the household duties, as many as 24.46 per cent in rural areas and 21.93 per cent in urban areas were willing to accept work if the same is made available at their residence.<sup>30</sup>

Table 25: Percentage distribution of females (5 years and above) Usually engaged in Household duties and Willing to Accept Work at their Residence by Type and Nature Work Acceptable for each Type of Work Acceptable

Type of work acceptable	Rural			Urban		
	Full time	Part time	Occasional	Full time	Part time	Occasional
Dairy	32.07	62.27	5.66	35.37	61.20	3.43
Poultry	26.69	65.87	7.44	34.48	53.91	11.82
Other animal husbandry	29.79	57.28	12.94	43.98	49.32	6.70
Spinning and weaving	23.10	64.83	12.07	25.48	61.13	13.40
Manufacturing wood & cane products	22.28	75.86	9.86	29.55	56.47	13.98
Tailoring	30.12	58.79	11.10	30.62	59.89	9.49
Leather goods manu. & repairing	41.46	50.22	8.31	43.08	52.57	4.35
Others	39.47	47.70	12.83	44.08	47.57	8.36
Total	29.81	60.87	9.32	33.48	57.41	9.11

Source: NSSO, 1987, op. cit., p. 96.

60 As regard their choice of work in rural areas, 32.7 per cent females preferred dairy activities, 20.2 per cent tailoring work, and 16.7 per cent spinning and weaving. In urban areas 40.2 per cent preferred tailoring, followed by spinning and weaving (15.3 per cent), and dairy farmers (15.2 per cent). It is interesting to note that all those who reported as available for work in the household were not available on a full time basis. In rural areas only 29.8 per cent of the female engaged in household duties reported that they were willing to accept work at their residence on a full time basis, another 60.9 per cent were prepared to accept work on a part time basis and the rest 9 per cent on occasional basis. In urban areas the corresponding percentages were 33.5, 57.4 and 9 respectively.<sup>31</sup>

#### Sectoral Trends:

61 A study of intra sectoral structure of our work force shows that females are mostly confined to low paid and unpaid jobs. In 1981, 81.6 per cent of female workers (as against 66.2 per cent of males) were engaged in the primary sector. In the secondary and tertiary sectors, the proportion of female workers was barely 8.9 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively. In the case of males these ratios are higher i.e. 13.9 per cent and 19.9 per cent respectively. It is

Table 26. Sectoral Distribution of Workers in 1971 and 1981.

Sector	1971		1981	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary	70.2	83.0	66.2	81.6
Secondary	11.5	7.7	13.9	8.9
Tertiary	18.3	9.3	19.9	9.5

Source: Census of India, 1981, Series-1, India, Part-II-Special, op. cit., P. 98.

interesting to note that during 1971-81, the proportion of female workers in the primary sector recorded some decline i.e. from 83.0 per cent in 1971 to 82.6 per cent in 1981. In the secondary and tertiary sectors the proportion of females to total female workers registered some increase.

Table 27. Percentage Distribution of Female Main Workers and Sex Ratio by Major Occupational Categories in 1971 and 1981.

Activity	Rural				Urban			
	Share in Employment		Sex Ratio		Share in Employment		Sex Ratio	
	1971	1981	1971	1981	1971	1981	1971	1981
Cultivations and agricultural labourers	87.1	87.4	250	320	21.7	21.2	260	280
Livestock, forestry, fishing hunting and Plantation, orchards & allied activities	2.6	1.8	230	210	2.1	1.9	140	140
Mining and quarrying industry	0.3	0.3	180	200	1.0	0.6	110	70
(a) Household industry	3.6	3.8	270	380	10.0	10.4	260	330
(b) Other than household industry	1.6	2.1	150	160	12.9	14.3	60	70
Trade & commerce	1.0	1.1	80	100	8.2	8.9	40	360
Other services	3.4	3.0	140	160	38.1	37.4	190	220
All Sectors	100.0	100.0	230	290	100.0	100.0	120	130

Source: Census of India 1971, Series 1 Part II B(i) General Economic Table B-1 (Part-A) Pg. 18-20, Census of India 1981, Series 1 Part II-Special, Table B1, B3 and B7 pp. 2-3, 6-9 and 24-29.

64. The intra sectoral distribution of workers by major/minor activity groups as per National Industrial Classification further reveals the extent of discrimination faced by women in the world of work as a result of social, cultural and economic factors. In the primary sector, their mainstay is agriculture and even in agriculture they mostly work as casual labourers. In mining and quarrying, women are mainly engaged in stone-quarrying where they work mostly as irregular casual workers. In the secondary sector, in household industries, where their share recorded some increase in 1981 over 1971, they primarily work as helpers. In the tertiary sector, they are again more absorbed in traditional low paid occupations.

65. The overall sex ratio for main workers works out to be 142 females per thousand males. According to the 1981 Census out of a total of 376 minor groups of activities under National Industrial Classification in only eight activities was the number of female workers found to be more than the male workers. The activities having favourable sex ratio i.e. where the number of female workers exceeds the number of male workers are (i) cashewnut processing like drawing, shelling, roasting, salting etc. (2093 females per thousand males); (ii) cotton spinning other than in mills (1517 females per thousand males); (iii) manufacturing of beedis (1236 females per thousand males); (iv) wool spinning and weaving (1199 females per thousand males); (v) tobacco stemming and redrawing (1104 females per thousand males); (vi)

canning and preservation of foods and vegetables (1093 females per thousand males); (vii) manufacturing of beverages, tobacco and tobacco products (1030 females per thousand males). In most other activities, the sex ratio of females is generally less than 100. In the modern sector in activities like manufacturing locomotives and parts of railway wagons and coaches, electrical repairs, plumbing, carpentry, wood work and electric installations, in transport business and services the proportion of female to male workers works out to be less than one per cent.

66. In land based activities which account for a very large proportion of female workers, the overall sex ratio of workers engaged in agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing is 200. The sex ratio of female workers is the highest in plantations (456). Among specific group of plantations again, the sex ratio is the highest in tea plantations (918), followed by cardamom plantations (750) coffee plantations (751). In livestock production, the sex ratio among main workers is only 149. The major activities in which women are predominantly engaged in, include cattle and goat-breeding, rearing and ranching and production of milk, rearing of pigs and other animals, rearing of ducks, hens and other birds. These activities account for over 90 per cent of female workers engaged in livestock production. The sex ratio of main workers in agricultural services which includes pest destroying, spraying, pruning of infected stems, operation of irrigation system, animal rearing, horticulture and nursery services and soil conservation is barely 97. In an activity like soil testing the sex ratio is as low as 28.

67. In other sectors women are mainly engaged in traditional occupations and their proportion in high paid secondary and tertiary occupations in the modern sector is very insignificant. Some other trends in the intra-sectoral changes in the economic activity structure of female workers are as follows.

Table 28. Sex Ratio of Main Workers (other than Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers) by Major NIC Groups 1981.

Division/Major Group of NIC	Sex Ratio
All Divisions	142
Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry and Fishing	200
Plantation	456
Livestock production	149
Agricultural Services	79
Forestry and logging	196
Fishing	60
Mining and Quarrying	148
Coal mining	56
Crude petroleum and natural gas	52
Metal ore mining	250
Other mining	285
Manufacturing and Repair	170
Manufacturing of food products	159
Manufacturing of beverages, tobacco and tobacco products	1030
Manufacturing of cotton textiles	233
Manufacturing of work, silk & synthetic fiber textile	257
Manufacturing of Jute, hemp and mesta textiles	43
Manufacture of textile products (including wearing apparel other than footwear)	148

Manufacture of wood and wood products, furniture and fixture	185
Manufacture of paper and paper products and printing, publishing and allied industries	52
Manufacture of leather and leather and fur products	43
Manufacture of rubber, plastic, petroleum and coal products	80
Manufacture of chemicals & chemical products	207
Manufacture of non-metallic mineral products	243
Basic metal and alloys industries	24
Manufacture of metal products and parts, except machinery and transport equipment	36
Manufacture of Machinery, Machine Tools, and parts, except Electrical Machinery	23
Manufacture of electrical machinery, apparatus, appliances, and supplies and parts	66
Manufacture of transport equipment and parts	16
Other manufacturing industries	54
Repairs	64
Electricity, Gas and Water	25
Electricity	24
Gas and steam	15
Water works and supply	34
Constructions	112
Construction	122
Activities allied to construction	19
Wholesale and retail trade and restaurants and hotels	71
Wholesale trade in food, textiles, live animals, beverages and intoxicants	29
Wholesale trade in fuel, light, chemicals, Perfumery, Ceramics and Glass	46
Wholesale trade in wood, paper, other fabrics, hide and skin and inedible oils	20
Wholesale trade in all types of machinery, equipment, including transport and electrical equipment	41
Wholesale trade in miscellaneous manufactures	31
Retail trade in food and articles, beverage, tobacco and intoxicants	91
Retail trade in textiles	19
Retail trade in fuel and other household utilities and durables	91
Retail trade in others	53
Restaurants and hotels	71
Transport Storage and Communications	29
Land transport	22
Water transport	24
Air transport	95
Storage and warehousing	54
Communications	71
Financing, Insurance, Real Estate and Business Services	65
Banking and similar type of financial institutions	84
Providents and insurance	107

Real estate and business services	36
Legal services	28
Community, Social and personal services	204
Public Administration and defence services	57
Sanitary services	411
Education, scientific & research services	355
Medical and health services	348
Community services	97
Recreational and cultural services	71
Personal services	376
International and other extra territorial bodies	125
Services not elsewhere classified	147

Source: Based on Census of India, 1981, Series-1, India, Part-II, Special, op. cit., pp. 36-59.

68. Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers: In agriculture, females are mainly engaged as agricultural labourers. As agricultural labourers they comprise 60.0 per cent of all agricultural workers as against 32.1 per cent in the case of male workers. Even in urban areas, it may be noted that 21 per cent of women are engaged in the primary sector, almost all of them as agricultural labourers.

Table 29 Sex Ratio of Agricultural Workers in 1971 and 1981

State	1971	1981
Andhra Pradesh	514	627
Bihar	184	202
Gujarat	246	294
Haryana	415	105
Karnataka	276	414
Kerala	348	398
Madhya Pradesh	387	491
Maharashtra	525	709
Orissa	113	207
Punjab	048	031
Rajasthan	171	216
Tamil Nadu	330	547
Uttar Pradesh	130	139
West Bengal	079	106
India	257	319

Source: Banerjee N. Some Recent Trends in the Economic Activities of Indian Women, NCSEW, 1988, p. 12.

69. Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, Plantation, Orchards and Allied Activities: This sector accounts for about 2 per cent of total women workers. The overall relative share of



female employment, during 1971-81, in this sector has registered some decline. In rural areas the sex ratio declined from 230 in 1971 to 210 in 1981. In urban areas, it remained constant at 140. In livestock production, the overall sex ratio in 1981 works out to be 149. In areas like cattle and goat-breeding and rearing and the production of milk the sex ratio is as low as 165. Although, the share of women workers in dairy has registered some increase yet, the total number of females employed in dairy farming is still very low. In traditional plantations and forestry, females have maintained their relative position but they have not been able to take advantage of the expansion in work opportunities in new plantation crops like fruits and nuts and other cultivation. In fishing, because of modernisation and the thrust on export orientation, the share of female workers has declined. The overall sex ratio in fishing is barely 60. In pisciculture and ocean/sea and coastal fishing the sex ratio varies from 23 to 35 only.

Table 30. Sex Ratio of workers in Selected Categories of Forestry Plantation, Livestock and Fishing

Industry	Total Employment		Sex Ratio of Workers	
	No. in 000 in 1981	% Change over 1971-81	1981	% change over 1971-81
Roots, tubes, vegetables, flowers etc.	106	4.0	280	3.8
Other agriculture not included elsewhere	82	1071.4	68	(-) 19.5
Traditional plantation	772	(-) 26.0	810	2.7
Other plantations	593	204.1	161	16.6
Livestock	1856	0.8	149	29.8
Forestry & logging	360	53.2	197	36.4
Fishing	790	34.2	60	18.2

Note: Traditional plantation includes tea, coffee, rubber, tobacco, pepper, cardamom. Other plantation includes nuts, fruits, coconuts, ganja, chinchona, opium etc.

Sources: Census of India 1971, Series 1 Part-II-Special, (B) (iii) General Economic Tables, 1977, Table B (IV)—Part-A, pp.13-19.  
Census of India 1981 Part-II-Special, Table B-12, pp. 36-39

70. Mining and Quarrying: During 1971-81, the relative share of the female workers in this group remained somewhat constant. The overall sex ratio, during this period, increased from 180 in 1971 to 200 in 1981 in rural areas, whereas in urban areas it decreased from 110 in 1971 to 70 in 1981. In the public sector as well as the leading industrial groups in coal, iron ore and metal mining, female employment during the last two decades has remained almost static. There has been a sharp decline in the number of female workers engaged in coal mining particularly after the nationalisation of this industry. There are reports that in the public sector coal mines, regular registered female workers have been encouraged to retire 'voluntarily' after nominating a male successor with the active connivance and support of the management and unions and thus given 'golden handshake'.<sup>32</sup>

However, there has been a significant increase in female employment under stone-quarrying and mica mining which are entirely under private management and largely run by contractors through hiring daily labourers. Even in mine, under the public or private corporate

management, there is an extensive use of contract or casual labour and females are largely engaged as casual labourers in these units. There is a possibility of under-reporting of women's employment obviously with a view to avoid labour laws in such establishments. During 1971-81 possibly as a result of the organized protest by mine workers, the incidence of casual labour in this sector has fallen sharply and the incidence of regular wage workers has increased correspondingly.

71. Manufacturing, Household and Non-household Industry: Next to agriculture, manufacturing constitutes the single biggest source of employment to women. During 1971-81, the proportion of females engaged in this sector has recorded a significant increase in both rural and urban areas. The sex ratio in rural areas increased from 270 in 1971 to 380 in 1981 and in urban areas from 260 in 1971 to 330 in 1981.

72. Within this sector, however, the percentage share of female workers in traditional industries, i.e. food, tobacco and textile has remained almost static. In the broad groups of foods and textiles, the share of female workers has declined. In the cashew industry and coffee curing, on account of mechanisation and consequent shift from household enterprises to other forms of organisation, women's employment has suffered. The non-traditional group of industries like garments, plastics, and rubber products have recorded a sizeable increase in the share of female employment. Females have gained more in industries where putting out work is common, like, garments, coal, ceramics, chemicals and metallurgical and engineering, plastics, rubber products and tobacco processing.<sup>33</sup>

73. The overall sex ratio in non-traditional modern industries remains incredibly low. In industries like fertilizers and pesticides, manufacture of paints, varnishes, and lacquers, manufacture of chemical products, structural clay products, fur and skin rugs and other articles, printing, dyeing and bleaching of cotton textiles, manufacture of wooden furniture and fixtures, metal products and parts, manufacture of machineries, electric equipment, transport equipments and parts; electricity, gas and steam works, the sex ratio of workers ranges from 0 to 50.

74. Four industries, viz, food beverages and tobacco textiles, wood and wooden products and ceramics account for over 86 per cent of female workers engaged in manufacturing activities.

75. In manufacturing industries, during 1977-83, the proportion of self-employed women workers declined, whereas the number of casual and regular wage workers increased significantly.

76. The manufacturing sector has thus witnessed mixed developments. There are some shifts in favour of non traditional industry. Women are looking for new avenues in the modern sector but their entry to this sector is generally confined to less skilled jobs. For instance, in rubber, plastic and petroleum women's gains are more confined to rural areas using less modern techniques and producing less valuable products. Women have also lost their share in many industries with the introduction of new technologies. The new technological changes have unfortunately resulted in female workers being replaced by male workers.<sup>34</sup>

77. Construction Work: In construction the sex ratio of workers has increased from 106 in 1971 to 122 in 1981. The proportion of females to total workers engaged in construction increased from 9.1 per cent in 1971 to 9.9 per cent in 1981, out of 3.5 million construction workers, nearly 0.3 million were females (NSSO 38th round estimates number of construction workers as 6.5 million of these 15 per cent i.e. 1.0 million were women workers). The increase is primarily in the rural areas. In urban areas, the share of female workers in construction, has remained more or less constant. This may be partly because of the numerous public works programmes promoting employment as a part of rural poverty eradication measures of the

Government.

78. In allied categories, like, plumbing, electrical installations, and woodwork related to construction the share of female workers has declined sharply in both urban areas. The decline is more evident in industries allied to construction, particularly brick and tile making, where the sex ratio has sharply declined. This is probably because of the modernisation of brick and tile making units, resulting in organisational change i.e. from being run mainly as a household enterprise to factory units. The incidence of casual female labour in construction has increased from 93 per cent in 1977 to 97 per cent in 1983.

79. Trade and Commerce: In trade and commerce the share of female workers has shown some gain in both rural and urban areas. The sex ratio in trade and commerce has increased from 80 in 1971 to 100 in 1981 in rural areas and from 40 in 1971 to 60 in 1981 in urban areas. The number of female workers in this sector is still very insignificant i.e. one per cent of the total female workers, and this percentage has remained stationary during 1971-81.

80. Other Services: During 1971-81, there was a noticeable improvement in the number of women workers in this sector in both the rural and urban areas. The sex ratio increased from 140 in 1971 to 160 in 1981 in rural areas and from 190 in 1971 to 220 in 1981 in urban areas. However, the number of females employed in this sector as a percentage to the total number of female workers declined both in the rural and urban areas. For instance, in the rural areas the proportion of female workers in other services to the total number of female workers fell from 3.4 per cent in 1971 to 2.9 per cent in 1981, and in the urban areas from 38.1 per cent in 1971 to 37.4 per cent in 1981. Amongst services, the sex ratio of workers is highest in a personal service (376). Again in personal services, women workers are found more in domestic services where the ratio is as high as 885 followed by laundries and laundry services (530). During 1971-81, the sex ratio of women in education, medical and administrative services has shown some significant increase. The sex ratio in these professions in 1981 varied from 355 in education and scientific research to 379 in medical and health. In sanitary services the sex ratio is 411.

81. A Study of the Gender Bias in Employment of Women in the urban Informal Sector, undertaken by the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) brings forth a number of interesting findings with respect to nature of women's work in self-employed sector, its structure, size and capital base, earnings, productivity and marketing. Some of the findings are briefly reported as follows.<sup>35</sup>

i) Occupational Pattern: In urban areas, nearly 40 per cent of self-employed women are engaged in services, followed by 30 per cent in trade, 15 per cent in manufacturing, 8 per cent in construction and 5 per cent in primary activities. A majority of such enterprises consisted of one person enterprises engaged in petty businesses like dairying, pottery-making and selling of dolls and statues; goldsmithy; selling of pan-bidis, fruits and vegetables; fruit vending; laundry; making and selling of leaf, cane and bamboo products, collection and selling) of firewood and cowdung cakes. In these occupations the respondent and the family members are mainly involved as workers.

ii) Further, a greater proportion of the self-employed women outside the home (57 per cent) than within the home (43 per cent). Of those working outside the home, only a very small number, i.e. 8 per cent have 'pukka' structures at their work place. A large percentage of them (over 60 per cent) are either mobile or operate from pavements and "are vulnerable to the vagaries of weather which spells irregularity in work and income". A lack of appropriate physical structure leaves them with a high degree of uncertainty about the place of work and their future plans for expansion and technological improvement in their work operations.

iii) Size of Enterprise: Over two-thirds of the enterprises are self-owned and

self-managed. Another one-third have two to five persons per unit.

iv) Access to Capital : The level of fixed capital in women owned or run enterprises is extremely low. Nearly two-thirds of enterprises have fixed capital of less than Rs.50. About 10 per cent of the enterprises have fixed capital over Rs.2,000. "In several activities, such as beedi, agarbati packing, rag picking, rope and charpai making, the quantum of fixed capital used is either zero or marginal." However, the requirement of working capital in some other occupations is relatively high. In rag picking and collection of cowdung, hardly any working capital is required but in activities like embroidery, making and selling of dolls; leaves, cane and bamboo products; selling of fruits, vegetables and pan-bidis; food vending, dairying; poultry and running of dhabas, working capital requirements vary from Rs. 500 a month to Rs.2,000 a month.

v) Input and Output Linkages; The requirement of inputs in the self-employed sector are mostly met from the informal sector. The produce is generally sold directly to the households, without using any formal channels for distributions. "The production of intermediate or capital products by this sector is almost negligible". The enterprises are, thus, highly dependent on localized demand from households and changes in either the demand pattern or supply pattern often proves fatal.

vi) Level of Earnings: Over four-fifths of self-employed workers earn less than Rs.500 per month. About one-tenth of workers earn Rs.100 per cent earn Rs.300 per month. Women in weaving, spinning; embroidery, packing of bidis and agarbattis, selling of pan-bidis, cigarettes and rag picking, domestic services, scavenging, selling of groceries, construction and making of paper, envelopes and bags; selling of ropes and charpays, running of dhabas and food vending earn less than Rs. 500 per month. All such activities in which wage contract work predominates are associated with lower earning.

82. Women in the Organized Sector: The growth of the organized sector in our economy has been rather slow. It barely accounts for one tenth of the total work force. A bulk of employment in the organised sector comes from the public sector. In the public sector, women's share has also been stagnating around 11 to 13 per cent of the total number of employees. In 1986, out of a total of 25.3 million persons employed in the organized sector, 3.3 million i.e. 13.1 per cent were women. The public sector, accounting for 70.8 per cent (17.1 million persons) of the total employment in the organized sector, provided employment to 2.0 million women. In the private sector, women workers accounted for 17.8 per cent of the total number of workers.<sup>36</sup>

83. Women and Modernisation: There are several studies based on the Census records about the impact of development on women's work in the economy. Their broad conclusion is that during the present century there has been a steady decline in women's traditional activities without a corresponding expansion of their role in the modern sector. The process of modernisation has generally identified with several kinds of development such as opening up of the economy to wider market forces, introduction of mechanised and energised tools and equipment in production and organisation of production process in the capitalist mode. Census figures showing shifts of the workers between occupations and industries provide some indications of the course of development and its impact on different groups of workers.

84. It seems that the process of modernisation in our economy has had two effects: transformation of traditional industries into modern capitalistic enterprises, and the growth of new manufacturing and service industries (chemical, metal, electronic etc.). The modernisation process has also affected the agricultural sector by way of introducing fertilizers, pesticides and modern implements. The data on female labour force show that women also are involved in this process of modernisation. However, although women are now working in

diverse occupations, the basic pattern of their employment or the strict division of labour between men and women has not been affected. In other words, though women have, to some extent, started working in new industries, they work on relatively less skilled jobs. In fact, women are dominating only in these few less skilled or low productivity jobs. In the majority of modern occupations the sex ratio remains incredibly low.

85. In this context the findings of Mitra (1981) are worth noting. Mitra divides all occupations into three categories, traditional, mixed and modern and assessed the sex ratios of workers in each occupation as well as in each of the groups.<sup>37</sup> There are very few Indian industries which can be classified without any reservation under just one or the other of the three broad categories viz. traditional, mixed and modern. In almost all cases, several kinds of technology ranging from manual to highly mechanised are simultaneously in use. This applies even to traditional activities such as agriculture, fishing or leather industry. Similarly, production organisations also vary widely within most industries from large scale capitalist form to merchant capital operations down to the self-employed producing for local markets.

86. A study of the census data during 1961-81 reveals that during the sixties, women's share in employment in both traditional and mixed sectors had declined. In the modern sector it had remained unchanged. During 1971-81, there was a rise in women's relative role in traditional occupations in both rural and urban areas which is largely accounted for by the significant rise in their role in agriculture. In mixed occupations in both rural and urban areas, tobacco and garment industries accounted for most of the improvement in the overall sex ratio. In the modern sector, it is (Annex - I) some services, specially education and administrative and professional services where their overall position has improved.

87. In spite of these few shifts, on the whole there is no reason to say that there is any qualitative change in women's position the development process. Women's relative position is better and improving only in occupations where there was already a significant number of them in the workforce. There is no indication of an even, across-the-board improvement or sudden opening of new venues for them. The earlier trend of women moving out of an industry when the latter becomes more capital intensive apparently still prevails.<sup>38</sup>

88. Female Workers and Skills: The proportion of skilled workers among females is very low. In the Twenty Seventh Round of the NSSO, nearly 90 per cent of female workers in rural areas and over 70 per cent in urban areas were found to be unskilled workers. Again the skill amongst female workers are confined to a few traditional occupations like spinning and weaving which account for 40.3 per cent of all female skilled workers, followed by tailoring (17.3 per cent), book binders (16.8 per cent), weavers, bidi making (13.8 per cent), basket making (6.8 per cent), and potters (6.8 per cent). In urban areas as many as 28.3 per cent of female skilled workers are engaged in spinning and weaving followed by tailoring (24.7 per cent), bidi making (16.9 per cent), basket making (2.7 per cent).

### **III. Some Selected Occupational Profiles**

89. Several sectoral micro studies were sponsored by the Commission to gain some more insight about the working women in the depressed sectors like those working as domestic workers, vendors and hawkers, construction workers, and those engaged in food processing; fisheries and handicrafts. The micro studies sponsored by the Commission present a telling account of the deprivation suffered by them. Some highlights of the studies and the major problems faced by them are as follows:

90. Female Domestic Workers: As per Thirty Second Round of NSSO (1977-78), there were 16.8 lakhs female domestic workers as against 6.2 lakhs male domestic workers. Thus the proportion of female domestic workers is two and a half times more than the male

Table 31. Percentage Distribution of Female Workers by Type of Skills, 1977-78

Type of Skill	Rural	Urban
Typist, stenographer	0.17	2.27
Fisherman	0.12	0.12
Miner	0.11	0.18
Spinner	2.56	4.06
Weaver	1.60	4.57
Tailor	1.78	7.53
Shoe-maker	0.05	0.23
Carpenter	0.01	0.01
Mason	0.02	0.11
Moulder	—	0.02
Machineman	—	0.02
Fitter	—	0.02
Welder	—	—
Blacksmith	0.03	0.06
Goldsmith	0.01	0.03
Silversmith	0.01	0.01
Electrician	—	—
Driver	—	0.04
Boatman	0.01	0.06
Potter	0.07	0.04
Nurse	0.13	1.07
Basket-maker	0.70	0.83
Toy-maker	—	0.10
Brick-maker	0.05	0.16
Bidi-maker	1.42	5.15
Book-binder	1.73	0.09
Barber	0.03	0.01
Thatcher	0.14	0.06
Others	0.97	3.26
No skill	89.69	69.48
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Government of India, Department of Statistics, Sarvekshana, Vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2, Table 8, pp. 519-522, 1981.

domestic workers. The sex ratio among domestic workers works out to be 2710.

91. Domestic work involves a multitude of jobs like sweeping, swabbing, cooking, washing clothes and dishes, shopping, child care, and chauffeuring. In short, it covers all the household chores that are part of a woman's role in a patriarchal society. In rural areas, it includes agriculture-related jobs within the household. Even in domestic jobs the more paying and higher status jobs like chauffeuring and cooking are done by men. Recently, with the increase in the number of young unmarried girls taking up this work as daughters of the domestic workers, this occupation has become hereditary, generationally reproducing their skill and education disadvantages preventing them from moving out to other occupations.

92. Domestic workers are often called domestic servants. They possess no other marketable skills. They may work part time in 3-7 different homes, work fulltime in one household but live outside, or work and live full time in the same household. The wages and other benefits are settled arbitrarily. The wages may differ substantially for the same kind of job in the same locality.

93. Domestic workers have no specific terms of employment, no rigid job description, no social security benefits (provident fund, gratuity, pension, medical facilities), no provision for paid leave etc. Strangely, part time workers may be better off than full time workers, and full time workers better off than full time cum live-in workers. Often if a worker takes leave for more than a few days, she is expected to provide a substitute or she is dismissed on-the-spot, or she may come back only to find that she has been replaced permanently. There is no protective legislation to protect their interest. A unique feature of domestic workers is that each worker is isolated from the other and the problem of organising them is almost insurmountable. It is difficult to make them meet to discuss their problems and develop a common identity.

94. In short, female domestic workers are subjected to the worst kind of exploitation. It is not only that they work on casual and temporary basis, suffer from total casualisation of work and are devoid of legal protection, particularly in terms of payment of wages and hours of work but they are often suspected for thefts and harassed by the employer as well as the police. They remain voiceless and nameless spectators of their misfortune.

95. It is felt that these workers urgently need recognition of their status as workers; legal protection for better wages, fair and strictly adhered to terms of employment (hours of work, leave, etc.), and social security benefits; provision of proper living quarters, including low cost hostels for single women, which will remove them from their employers constant demands and supervision; strictly enforced educational and recreational facilities for children, to facilitate their general development and assure them the chance of seeking alternative employment.<sup>39</sup>

96. Female Vendors and Hawkers: Mobile vendors and hawkers, petty traders engaged in selling vegetables, fruits, cloth and garments, cutlery, pots and pans, bangles and toys, cooked food and exchanging goods for old clothes and other household effects constitute another group of highly vulnerable female workers who are subjected to perpetual harassment by the authorities and the community. In fact, they are viewed as anti-social elements under the Indian Police Act, the Indian Railways Act and by the town planning authorities. Urban planners frequently consider them as impediments to planning and dysfunctional appendages to the city economies. Their activities are labelled as "unauthorised", regardless of the fact that this system offers opportunities for employment, cheap and convenient distribution of commodities. Their needs and functions are thus totally ignored by the planners.

97. The vendors and hawkers, play a very important role in the economy by providing goods and services at a cheap price at the doorstep. A woman vendor operates on a small scale, most of them toiling for 10-12 hours per day, yet scarcely earning Rs. 10-15 a day. In urban areas, they are largely concentrated in and around high density pockets like public markets, points of transportation, commercial centres and entertainment zones. In Delhi, in 95 or more weekly bazars, there are over 9000 women vendors struggling to earn a living through vending. What haunts the poor vendors is the lack of capital and space for marketing and displaying their products and recognition of their work by the authorities. In several cities, the vendors and hawkers are not entitled to licences to work and are harassed, even prosecuted for selling their products. They often have to bribe the police and other authorities to be able to continue their struggle for survival by selling what they possess.

98. There are instances when basket vendors are forced to pay bribes of Rs. 30-40 to the police for selling their baskets in market places. Creating obstacles and hindrances in their profession, forcing them to withdraw from their activities by means of frequent arrests, imposition of penalties and fines, confiscation of their goods, dragging them to court cases only add to their miseries and poverty. There are a lucky few who have been able to take advantage of some schemes operated under the DIR and the SEPUP (Self-Employment for Urban Poor). The lot of the rest is anybody's guess.

99. It is expected that recognition of their role and provision of space for carrying out their business; systematic licence system; social welfare programmes, including education and training, and assistance for expanding their business by providing suitable credit, inputs and marketing facilities would go long way in improving their status and earning capacity.<sup>40</sup>

100. Women in Dairying: Women's contribution to dairying ranges from collection of fodder, to milching of animals, cleaning and washing, and taking care of the animals. Not only they are the last to go to the bed, but they are the first to rise as early as around 2.30 A.M. for preparing animals for milching. Yet they hardly have any say, in owning the animals, or the cash income obtained from the sale of milk.

101. Even in the milk cooperatives, women are seldom included as members and are rarely seen on the managing committees. In fact, women's cooperatives are a rare event. It is an irony that most of them, though the providers of milk, do not get milk for their personal consumption. Being outside the cooperatives they do not get a fair price for the milk, or proper marketing outlets and are often in the clutches of the local moneylender or local procurers of milk. They are also the victim of other practices like sharing of milk and animals which works to their utter disadvantages.

102. There are some success stories of the dairy cooperatives of women which show that women can manage the cooperatives equally well and use their income for the betterment of the family. Several suggestions offered to protect the interest of women engaged in dairying include: (i) fifty per cent of members of milk cooperatives should be women; (ii) each cooperative should have two female members on the managing committees; (iii) 10 to 30 per cent of cooperatives should be exclusively women's cooperatives, and (iv) DRDAs should have lady extension officers to involve women as beneficiaries and as owner of milch animal.<sup>41</sup>

103. Women in Construction: Women engaged in construction work are one of the most exploited group of workers. They suffer from the temporary and shifting nature of this work, to hardships of great physical labour in all types of weather and exploitation from middlemen and contractors. They toil hard, earn meagre wages, and struggle with insecurity looming large over their heads. Frequent changes in their work-sites and instability of their work, deprive them and their children from primary facilities like health, education and ration cards. Their health problems become worse on account of unhealthy surrounding, hazardous nature of work and low and irregular wages which is below even subsistence level. They are largely engaged as unskilled workers even though they perform a highly specialised work. More paying and so-called skilled jobs are invariably taken up by males; the idea of women entering these areas is just unthinkable. Employers seldom pay them wages on time, the payments remain unsettled even when they are leaving the work site or leaving for their native place. Often they have to make a futile chase in locating their ex-employers on return from their native homes.

104. According to the 1981 Census out of a total of 36 lakh construction workers, 10 per cent were female. The corresponding NSSO figure in 1983 is 65 lakh of whom 15 per cent constitute female workers.



105. The variability in labour absorption in construction work is much more pronounced for women than for men. It has been often noticed that whenever there is any increase in demand for labour in this sector, the rise in the female employment rates is much greater than that of males. On the other hand, whenever there is any shrinkage in the workforce, the fall is more drastic in the case of female workers than of the males. It appears that women construction workers form a reserve army coming to the aid of the construction industry and are first to get retrenched when the work slows down.

106. Although the construction workers are covered under various acts like the Minimum Wages Act, the Contract Labour Act and the Inter-state Migrant Workers Act, these acts exist in paper only; in practice they are blatantly violated by the employers. Several steps which are likely to help these workers include: (i) stringent enforcement of the provisions of the laws, (ii) strict punishment for the violation, (iii) allowing trade unions and NGOs to file cases of violation of the labour laws, (iv) welfare programmes financed by the employers or contractors, (v) provision of educational training for upgrading their skills, (vi) designing of tools and equipments to make the work less hazardous and less arduous for women, (vii) provision of welfare facilities like creches, medical doctor/mobile dispensary etc., (viii) organisation of the women construction workers to protect their rights and fight against exploitation.<sup>42</sup>

107. Women in Mining and Quarrying: Mining and quarrying has been another important sector employing poor women in all kind of strenuous and hazardous work. The abolition of underground work by women in mines (1929) and prohibition of work in night shifts (1952) and introduction of new improved technology, particularly, after the nationalization of coal mines has led to considerable decline in the share of women workers in mines. In fact the introduction of improved technology in mines has led to 'voluntary' retirement and "golden handshake" for women resulting in 30 per cent decline in female workers in coal mines in eighties.

108. The major problems confronting women in this sector include: (i) high incidence of casualization as women are predominantly engaged as contract workers; (ii) insecurity of employment; (iii) low wages; (iv) very low percentage of permanency (43.6 per cent of women workers are permanent as against 78.5 per cent of male workers), (v) non-enforcement of labour laws; (vi) incidence of bonded labour system in some mines particularly in quarrying and (vii) hazardous and strenuous nature of work. Here again what is needed is the strict enforcement of labour legislation and provision of welfare programmes including education and training for acquisition of skills.<sup>43</sup>

109. Women in Food Processing: The food processing industry is one of the earliest home based industries, where work is largely performed by poor women. The industry covers a wide range of items like processing of vegetables, fruits, pickles, chutneys, papad, chips, spices, a variety of perishable food items. It is recently emerging as an export oriented industry where thirty per cent of its products are being exported.

Typically the production process in food processing is carried out in several forms/levels; these may be broadly categorised as follows:

Home based level: Working as a family, or under the putting out sub-contracting system, producing snacks with a shelf-life.

Street-level: Working as a family with or without one or two employees, producing ready-to-eat snacks, beverages and/or cheap meals.

Shop-level: With 5-8 employees, making products with a shelf-life for packaging.

Canteen-level: With 5-10 employees, making products with a shelf-life for packaging.

Workshop level: About 25 employees, producing products with a shelf-life.

Factory-level: Generally automated plants.

110. The greatest number of women are employed in the home-based production. It is very low at the street, shop and at factory levels. Usually the work is seasonal and the demand for products fluctuates. About 40 to 50 per cent of workers in this industry do not get regular work. Sub-contracting is widespread as it ensures that the scattered workers do not get united and therefore labour laws could be circumvented. In traditional mode of production women labour is clearly preferred as they can be paid very little and are less demanding. A woman engaged in papad making earns bare Rs. 5 to Rs. 7 per day after putting in 6 to 7 hours of strenuous work.

111. Mechanisation often displaces women by men. Even with small introduction of mechanisation women are thrown out of employment and their work is taken over by the men. Job experience is of little value to workers as women working for 15 years and more have little improvement in their wage and status.

112. Marketing is done at many levels; residence, door to door, street, shop levels. Women are not significantly involved in marketing.

113. The most-regrettable fact is the lack of data on these women. There are some women's organisations in the food processing industry, such as Indira Kitchens or Lijjat Papad, Annapurana Mahila Mandal and others which have lend some viability to female workers engaged in this profession.

114. It is high time to recognise the status of these women workers, provide them legal protection (strict enforcement) for better wages, job security and social security benefits, regular employment, free them from the shackles of middlemen (which cuts into their wages and takes marketing out of their control) alongwith restriction of sub-contracting and putting out system and provide easy access to credit, education, training for their betterment.<sup>44</sup>

115. Women in Fisheries: India has a 6000 Km. long coastline and a large number of rivers which support about 65 lakh fishermen. In fisheries women are mainly involved in all process after the fish is landed. The main operations in which women are involved include (i) fish vending, (ii) fish processing—drying and curing, (iii) prawn processing, (iv) loading and unloading, (v) net making.

116. Marketing is often done house to house or at the rural market or in towns by the women fish vendors. In areas where fish is caught in bulk, the bulk transportation to major cities is done by males. The fisherwomen travel long distances to purchase fish from wholesale markets (about 40 to 80 Km. in Bombay) and disperse to their own vending places. The problem faced by female fish vendors are (i) middlemen who treat them roughly and brutally, and cheat them in transactions; (ii) lack of ready cash/credit; (iii) problems of transportation to the market—uncertainty of transport, expensive private transport, discrimination against women in public transport and unreasonable transport charges for carrying load; (iv) exploitative market taxes (though the rates are stipulated by the local authorities, in many markets the right to collect taxes is auctioned to private persons who enhance the charges at their will); (v) the perishable nature of this commodity; (vi) the squabbles and games in the auctions, which are often not fairly conducted; (vii) the squabble for vending space, between men and women, and between women themselves; (viii) harassment by police, municipal authorities, since they are seldom granted licence; and (ix) seasonal nature of work.

117. There is hardly any fishing during the monsoons. When women are involved in large-scale vending, they have to go to distant landing centres to purchase fish. This leads to special problems as they are not permitted to travel in trains and therefore have to hire lorries, sitting for 20-24 hours with their loads to get back to their home areas.

118. Several women are engaged only in drying fish and selling it in wholesale or retail markets. The wholeseller normally takes six months to make payments. The major problem

faced by these women include: lack of regular supply of fish for drying; difficulties in procuring salt at market rates as the merchants deliberately increase the price of salt in coastal areas; lack of drying and storage space.

119. Women involved in prawn processing have special problems. They are engaged mainly in shelling, grading and packaging. Often the contractors prefer young and unmarried women displacing older fisherwomen who have no other means of livelihood. The younger women living far away from their families, are more easily exploited and controlled.

120. Women in shelling sheds are mostly engaged as casual workers earning barely Rs. 5-6 a day. Women working as graders though categorised as "skilled", get the same wages as the men who are engaged in loading and cleaning as unskilled workers. Earning of these women rarely exceeds Rs. 500 per month.

121. Large contractors often provide living quarters to fisherwomen at congested places close to the workshed or factory but far away from urban centres leading to complete isolation of the women from the outside world. Their free movement is restricted and even letters are intercepted. They often work for long hours i.e. 12 hours at a stretch beginning any time of the day or night. As contractors are not licenced, they are not covered by any legislation. The workers are engaged on casual or temporary basis or paid only in the fishing season i.e. from August to April and they have to pay for the return passage out of their own savings.

122. In the large fish landing centres, the job of loading and unloading is taken by women at a rate of one rupee per basket. Women are forced to accept such low wages because of mechanization which has reduced wages and displaced them entirely. These women have to work wading in knee-deep water with heavy loads which is hazardous. The prolonged exposure to water affects their health adversely.

123. Women engaged in net making, especially in the coastal regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, generally buy the twine themselves, maintaining control over the entire production and marketing process. They mostly work on a putting-out system, and are paid by the kilo, earning Rs. 3-4 per eight hours of work. The major problems faced by them are low rates for piece-rate work. Their existing work is being threatening by the introduction of machines for nylon-net manufacture.

124. Women in fisheries are completely neglected. The Fisheries Departments in different States know very little about their working conditions and their needs. Fisher women's cooperatives have come up in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, but in the absence of adequate financial and technical support from the State the cooperatives are facing difficulties.

125. Modernisation of fishing has also adversely affected the fisherwomen. It has displaced them without providing any alternative employment. There is urgent need for taking up a multi-prolonged strategy to ensure a fair deal and returns to poor fisherwomen. It is necessary to provide protection and regeneration of fish resources, recognize the status of fisherwomen as workers, provide them licences, covered them with protective legislations for better wages and working conditions, provide them social security benefits, promote women's cooperatives, and impart them necessary education, skill and training for handling new technologies.<sup>45</sup>

126. There are many more sectors in which female workers are equally invisible, equally neglected and equally exploited. Women workers in sericulture and silk industry, garment industry, tobacco processing, migrant workers, sweepers, devdasis, cart pullers, dock workers, dais, rag pickers, washer women, hamalas, prostitutes and even factory workers have similar stories to tell. These women have similar problems. They are invisible as workers and are therefore not recognised as workers by planners. There are no laws to protect them from exploitation, or laws are blatantly violated, or sometimes the existing laws are against them.

Their working and living conditions are miserable. They are not helped even by trade unions or NGOs, and there are no programmes for their upliftment from the government either.

127. Thus the poor working females in our economy are put in a highly disadvantageous situation. Broad trends in their employment pattern show that the economic development process has not yet brought out the desired changes in their economic life. Their problems are so complex and vexing that no single approach can provide a solution. It is only through a mass based organised effort that they can hope for the much promised fair deal envisaged in the constitutional and legislative provisions. Perhaps, it may, require a total national movement exploiting, to the fullest extent, all the available institutions, Governmental and non-Governmental within the framework of micro planning. What is needed is an individualised approach, meeting the basic needs in the areas of health, education and work opportunities. The poor need to be sensitised about their rights, demand the same and fight against the oppressed and exploitative order in an organised manner.

### Annex I

#### Sex Ratio of Workers (Other than Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers) in 1971 and 1981 in Traditional, Modern and Mixed Sectors

Sector	Rural		Urban	
	1971	1981	1971	1981
Traditional Occupations	213	567	103	348
1. Farm work	316	589	219	434
2. Forestry	210	227	61	106
3. Farmers and farm managers	146	172	90	86
4. Hunters and related work	116	165	55	42
5. Fishing and related work	68	64	22	29
6. Shoe and leather goods making	37	40	20	25
Modern Occupations	90	100	102	131
1. Teaching	164	919	623	792
2. Nursing and other medical and health technicians	576	647	1006	1147
3. Mineral treaters	391	576	269	87
4. Athlete, sports & related work	110	143	176	205
5. Service, NCC sport and recreation workers	101	118	51	91
6. Compositing, printing, engraving, bookbinders and related workers	88	102	28	48
7. Stationary engine & related equipment operators, material handling and related equipment operators	101	99	72	75
8. Well drilling and related work	164	91	22	

9. Directors, managers, working proprietors hotel and restaurant helpers	74	86	24	35
10. Chemical and related processing workers	128	63	34	48
11. Life scientists, physicians and surveyors	16	48	97	135
12. Clerical work office machine operators, miscellaneous work	34	45	70	112
13. Other professional, technical and related work	48	43	61	65
14. Book-keeping, cashiers and related work	19	38	28	85
15. Telephone, telegraph and related tele communications operators	51	33	200	230
16. Drughtsmen, science and engineering technicians	29	31	28	50
17. Painters	38	29	8	11
18. Chemists, physicists, geologists and other physical scientists	24	29	50	54
19. Pointsmen, signalmen, shunters, guards ticket collectors examiners and related work	15	14	6	14
20. Jurists	10	12	11	26
21. Directors and managers, financial institutions	6	9	14	38
22. Architects, engineers and surveyors	12	9	5	12
23. Postmen and messengers	3	8	2	12
24. Protective service workers	5	6	5	9
25. Electrical fitting and related electronic work	10	6	18	20
26. Drivers and firemen (railways)	4	5	1	5
27. Photographers and camera operators	—	5	5	15
28. Deck and engine room ratings, bars crews, boatmen	5	5	3	9
Mixed Occupations	171	200	100	109
1. Tobacco products	745	135	662	1026
2. Launderins, dry-cleaning and press	559	702	235	272
3. Craftsmen and production process work	489	602	269	311
4. Building caretaking sweepers, cleaners and relating work	287	415	403	444
5. House-keeping (donasilation work) cooks, maids, and bartenders, waitress and related work	366	390	404	518
6. Spinning—weaving' knitters' dyers and related work	380	348	163	179
7. Glass farming, potters and related work	225	263	184	187
8. Labours	191	211	155	144
9. Food and beverage processors	254	206	89	109
10. Mining, quarrying and related work	176	195	118	75
11. Workers not reporting any other occupations	184	192	49	78
12. Workers reporting occupations unidentifiable or inadequately described	172	181	53	116
13. Bricklaying, plastering and related work	131	177	115	105

14. Tailoring, dress making, sewers, upholsterers and related work	102	153	72	109
15. Manufacturer's agents, salesmen, shop assistants and related work	121	112	42	55
16. Social scientists	94	162	62	63
17. Merchants and shop keepers	81	100	55	54
18. Artists, writers and related work	98	70	101	94
19. Money lenders and pawn brokers	34	54	26	43
20. Metal processors	31	53	6	17
21. Directors, managers, wholesale and related trades	40	48	20	22
22. Insurance, real estate, securities and business services, salesmen and auctioners	22	27	15	24
23. Tool makers, machinists, plumbers welders, platers and related work	24	24	7	11
24. Office attendants (peons, draftries)	23	23	32	39
25. Administrators and executive officials	8	12	12	30
26. Carpenters, Joiners, cabinet makerscoopers and related work	21	10	8	10
27. Hair dressers, barbers, beauticians, and related work	6	9	6	12
28. Drivers	19	5	7	6

Sources: (i) Census of India 1971, Series 1, Part-II-BB(iv), Vol. I, General Economic Tables, Table B-V, Part-A, 1977 (pp) 2-65. 1977.  
(ii) Census of India 1981, Series I, Part-II-Special, 1983 (pp) 82-189.  
(iii) A Mitra et al: The Status of Women-Shifts in Occupational Participation 1961-71, (1980). pp 184-194.

नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

# 4

## IMPACT OF MACRO POLICIES ON UNPROTECTED WOMEN LABOUR

1. As has been evident from the previous chapters, the unprotected women labour suffer from various socio-economic disadvantages and are a vulnerable group. The development policies and programmes have had a positive impact in the country. However, the poor, specially women have not been covered adequately. While examining the existing policies, processes and insitutions through which development resources are channelised, the Commission kept in view its findings relating to unprotected women labour which are:—

- i) Among them poor, all women work.
- ii) Women workers perform a dual role in society relating to production and reproduction. This is not sufficiently recognised.
- iii) The poor women in most cases perform multifarious activities and they do not have a principal occupation. This is one of the reasons why they are not reflected correctly in the data base of the country
- iv) Women in poverty contribute significantly to meet the survival needs of their own families and also to the nation's economy and development.
- v) Women's contribution to the family economy and the national economy remains largely invisible and is under-valued.
- vi) Poor women are powerless with very little access to developmental resources.
- vii) Women workers face economic exploitation with low and discriminatory wages and equally meagre remuneration for their own account work.
- viii) Women are steeped in drudgery doing arduous work for long hours generally in unhygienic conditions affecting their health. They have a low nutrition status.
- ix) protective legislation in the critical areas of wages, maternity benefils, child care and social security have not benefitted a great majority of women in poverty.

- x) Labouring women have a low level of participation in decision making processes.
- xi) Although there is no obvious discrimination against women in the plans and programmes and there are special schemes for them, in implementation various socio-economic forces have operated against them and poor women have been largely left outside the pale of development.
- xii) The monitoring mechanisms need to keep labouring women in focus while monitoring developmental programmes.
- xiii) The existing communication channels are not adequate and do not reach out to the poor women.
- xiv) The existing delivery mechanisms are also not effective and the coverage of women in the developmental programmes is very low in proportion to their needs and numbers.
- xv) There is lack of integrated approach in the macro policies in tackling women's issues.
- xvi) Women workers do not have viable options to resist vested interests.
- xvii) Labouring women in poverty lack organising capabilities which make them more vulnerable to exploitation.

2. In view of the above findings, the Commission have examined the various macro policies in the context of the growth and advancement of poor women. The Commission has taken a note of existing policies, the lack of thrust vis-a-vis the poor women and the deprived situation of women because of lack of certain policies.

3. It has not been possible for the Commission to analyse every policy of the Government. Major policies have been studied as affecting labouring women. In the context, special studies and review papers were commissioned relating to sectors like Construction, Workers, Handloom, Industry, Mining, Food Processing, Fisheries, Hawkers, Vendors, Domestic, Workers, Handicrafts and policies regarding, anti poverty programmes, Institutional Funds Flow, Natural management, Licensing for Natural Resources, Headloaders in Railway yards, Urbanization, Housing and Child Care facilities.

## Natural Resource

4. The three natural resources of land, forest and water are inextricably linked and projects and programmes in one invariably affect the other.<sup>12</sup> Women's life in turn is intimately linked with all these three resources as the highest percentage of women are working on land as agricultural labour and 10 to 12 hours of her time is spent in working in the field, fetching water and gathering fuel and fodder. Still others gather a range of forest produce for self-consumption and sale or as raw material for craft and production. Policies and programmes relating to land, forest and water are thus of primary importance as far as women concerned. It may be mentioned that our society is a highly heterogeneous society stratified economically as well as socially. The distribution pattern of the resources is so uneven that on one hand we have a small group holding a large number of productive assets while the poor people have negligible productive resources, this is even more pronounced in the case of women amongst the poor.

## Land

5. Land is an important asset in India, over 70 per cent of the population derive their livelihood from it. Women have traditionally played an important role in land use whether it is for agriculture, pasture for animal husbandry, or land covered with forest. However, women's





access to ownership of land is extremely limited.

6. A complicated set of factors determine women's access to and control over productive and other resources. Some times laws deny women equal rights e.g. none of the Indian legal system recognise wife as a joint owner of husband's property. Then, there are contradictions within the legal system (customary laws, coded laws, statutory laws) and between personel laws governing women's ownership of property. Many customary laws relating to women's access to resources and usufructuary rights have been abbreviated by statutory laws e.g. forest laws and land laws.

7. Women's right to land can also be constrained by her marital status. Even if laws are not discriminatory, they have failed to protect women's interests. The ideology of patriarchy and its use in perpetuating a 'predominantly male inheritance system', sexual division of labour, discrimination in resource allocation, remuneration and treating women as supplementary earners, has helped perpetuate male dominance. Many a times women's own acceptance of subordination has strengthened institutionalised privileges, such privileges are embodied in both our cultural heritage and also in state policies. There seems to be little progress made in dismantling structures of gender inequalities.

8. The issue of access to resources is not only a legal one. The biggest blow to women's struggle for resources was the policy of land reforms which gave land titels to men and subsequently extension, training, credit, technology and inputs were disproportionately channeled to men. Privatisation of land through agrarian policies eroded women's traditional usufruct rights to communal land. Besides India, evidence from Asia and Africa also show transition from communal to private ownership of land and other resources had adversely affected women's access to resources, its management and their role in production system. Agrarian reforms generally aiming at more equitable distribution of land, invariably gave land to

male head of the household, further strengthening the institutional barriers to women's access to state institutions and resources as their legitimacy as farmers is not recognised. For example, in the recent land reforms in West Bengal, registering land ownership of share-croppers, 'operation barga' also women have been left out, despite the fact that women do most of the agricultural work on land.

9. Although we do not have official data, certain macro studies have shown that the number of women cultivators and women tenants have reduced and the number of landless women labourers has increased. The land reforms have adversely affected the ownership of land by women even in those areas where traditionally women own some lands. It is reported that in some parts of Kerala after the land reforms, women were thrown out of their lands and they became landless agricultural labour even though matriarchal system prevailed.<sup>3</sup>

10. Agriculture occupies a key position in Indian economy and women in turn contribute substantially in this area. Large per cent of women participate in different processes of agriculture like sowing, transplantation, harvesting and threshing. We however feel that the benefits flowing from agrarian policies to women have not been commensurate with that active participation in agriculture.

11. Women's membership in cooperatives (mainly multipurpose cooperatives) is negligible. Women therefore do not have any say in the decisions about the use of credit, input, supply, technology and marketing at the village level.

12. The Commission's own findings are that the Mahila Mandals need to be energised to promote more economic activities and assist women producers to get such inputs as subsidies and fertilizers.

13. Women's involvement in extension programmes also is very limited. Extension programmes are designed by men keeping in mind the needs of men and are implemented from man to man. Women extension officers have been employed only in a few experiments, in a scattered way, (Konkan District in Maharashtra, for example). Likewise women are involved in agricultural training in only a limited way. The Sixth Plan made a small beginning by starting a special project financed by DANIDA. The Seventh Plan has also introduced a T & V Programme exclusively for women. These special projects have however made only a limited impact so far.

14. Another disquietening feature is that with the rise in foodgrain production, the proportionate consumption of foodgrains has not been rising appreciably which means that more balanced growth in agriculture has not taken place and the purchasing capacity of rural poor has remained low. This kind of deprivation, particularly women who are most affected by the low consumption level of the family was observed by the Commission in all the States they visited.

15. In short, women have not yet received enough attention by policy makers in agricultural policies and programmes. They continue to be treated mainly as subordinate helpers or labourers. We also find, women workers have not received adequate protection from the Minimum Wages Acts as well as from the Equal Remuneration Act.

16. For one thing, there has been a general concentration of increase in foodgrains output in well advanced areas while large parts of agricultural land continue to be rain fed and subject to vagaries of monsoon.

17. A very disturbing feature is the number of landless is on the increase and women fall in this category. Their wages are very low and discriminatory in Maharashtra and some other State, the Commission was informed by the women labour that they get 3 & 4 rupees a day while men for the same work gets rupees 10 per day. It is a different matter that Rs.10/- fall below the minimum wages prescribed in these State.

18. Majority of women suffer from lack of employment and from under-employment during off season. It has come to light that agriculture labour is filling the ranks of other manual labour like construction workers specially in drought prone and arid areas. In some cases, they have to leave their land and work as migratory labour with accompanying horrifying consequences like lack of housing facilities and crowding in slums and becoming even pavement dwellers with no ration cards and practically no supportive services. This adversely affects their children's upbringing and schooling.

### **Water:**

19. Water is central to a poor woman's life both as a natural resource and for family consumption purpose, since women play a significant role in the agricultural processes and in food production, availability of water for increasing agricultural output is critical. It is estimated that 175 million hectares (53% of India's total and mass) are subject to serious environmental degradation due to rapid deforestation, soil erosion, siltation of reservoirs, water logging and salinity. In addition, the acute drought conditions in the last few years and floods in certain parts of the country, has further affected adversely the life conditions of the labouring women.

20. The policy of water resource management may be divided into providing water for irrigation purpose and for consumption purpose. While raising the agricultural productivity is a major rationale for increasing irrigation potential, there are number of deficiencies that have been identified in the implementation of these projects including major environmental problems such as secondary salinisation and alkalinisation of productive land, water logging of erstwhile fertile areas and a gap in the low utilisation of irrigation potential created which had a very negative impact on marginalised people who hardly enter the calculus of cost benefit analysis of such projects. The Narmada Valley Project which has received Government clearance is a case in point. It is one of the biggest river valley projects funded by the World Bank. The project involves building of 30 large dams, 135 medium sized dams and 3,000 minor irrigation schemes. The estimated cost is of about 90 billion but the final cost may well be over 250 billion.<sup>4</sup> A study done by an environmental action group indicated that at least 200,000 hectares of agricultural lands in areas will have to be protected against water logging and salinity and strict measures will have to be taken to protect forest in the catchment areas. Besides, the human cost of this project will be quite unprecedented as it will displace one million people. In addition to the cold statistics on investment, losses and the gap in the irrigation potential created and utilized, there is the most humane problem of rehabilitating millions of people who are termed as ecological refugees. The people affected will be mostly tribal population who have been cultivating the forest land. They do not have legal land titles and hence will not be entitled to compensation. In the rehabilitation scheme, the loss of common property resources is not recognised and cash compensation given for land taken over does not ensure livelihood and income. Besides, many landless households earn their livelihood by collecting forest produce and the resettlement programme has no idea, how they are going to be rehabilitated. In this section of the people, the women who are at the centre of agricultural activity as well as the collection of forest produce are the hardest hit. This has been the practical experience in project after project like 'The Bodhihat Dam', Srisaigan Dam' and the Bindusara irrigation project among others.

21. A report on resettlement experience of oustees from one such project (Srisaigan Dam on Krishna river about 200kms from Hyderabad), reveals that about 106,925 acres of land and 100 villages were affected by the Dam's reservoir in Karnool and Mahboobnagar Districts, displacing over one lakh people. The study covered 344 households and found that only land privately owned was compensated and those who farmed waste lands outside the villages



Water is central to her life, but she does not have access to it. (Courtesy: India Today)

secured nothing. Besides the work of disbursement of compensation, the eviction of villages and the facilities at resettlement site showed lack of concern for human misery.<sup>5</sup>

22. Another study of the resettlement of the oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat, covering only landholders who were promised land for land, found that they were sold lands on which the earlier owners had already borrowed substantial amounts or even worse were made to purchase lands which the same project was going to acquire for construction of canals. It has been brought to our notice that almost all the inhabitants of Panchmuli village who used to cultivate government wastelands and forest lands before they were evicted have not been paid any compensation. There have been occasions when water from irrigation projects has been diverted to other uses like industries and households as has been in the case of Bindusara Irrigation Project depriving village people of water for their crop and land.

23. A more economically viable alternative would be to promote the tapping of ground water resources and minor irrigation schemes. The advantages of this would be that it would be more cost-effective with relatively low investment cheaper and easily accessible to small farmer. In these local decentralised irrigation systems with simple technology the poor women who are most affected by the shortage of water can be involved in planning as well as implementation, through the local Mahila Mandals. Women should also be trained in using and repairing the water pumps. Thus women should be involved in different processes of management.

24. The problem of water shortage is also felt in hilly areas which have rain fed forest with abundance of natural resources though fast depleting, irrigation is the main problem faced by marginal and poor farmers. Therefore, water management is the key issue to solve the tribal women's continued poverty in the hills. The Commission is of the view that in these areas there should be small check dams. The scheme should in the beginning provide irrigation to the marginal farmers only so that their income is ensured from harvesting the first crop from the subsequent irrigation supply, they may be encouraged to grow nurseries, fodder, fruit trees, rear small animals or develop fish ponds depending on the local demand and needs.

25. The constraint in the existing forest policy is that irrigation which comes under State Government is not allowed on forest land by the forest department. Another constraint of the existing policy is that usually the irrigation departments undertake irrigation scheme costing 3 lakhs above while the scheme being suggested here would cost only upto 20 to 25,000. The forest dwellers, particularly women should be involved in planning small check dams and fixing pipelines and in the development of their land. The successful experiments carried out on these lines by Bhartiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF) in Maharashtra and Gujarat with tribal women are worth taking note of.

26. An evaluation study was done by CWDS of the 'piped water supply project' by the Gujarat Government in Banaskantha district assisted by Netherlands Govt. (NORAD). The study found that 78% of women in Santhalpur Taluka spent daily 4 hours on fetching water-53% of women complained of problems related to personal hygiene, menstruation and post natal period associated with water scarcity. 92% of women surveyed reported that they were never consulted about the site of the borewell or water standpost, hours of water supply in their village.<sup>6</sup>

27. The problem of non-availability of drinking water is still very acute for a large section of poor labouring women. Available data indicates that only 56% of women and 73% of urban population is covered with potable water supply. Two fifth of all villages are stated to be having severe water problems, 158,000 villages do not have a source of drinking water and in 26,000 villages, the water supply was contaminated with toxic elements. In rural and urban areas even where potable water supply is available, the poor women do not have easy access to it. The



Commission's own findings are that on an average, these women have to spend 3 to 4 hours a day to fetch water trekking long distances for households purposes and for animal husbandry. The ground water resources have been exploited not only through irrigation, but the process has been intensified with the advent of electric pumps, tube bored wells and shift in cultivation to water intensive cash crops like sugarcane. The indiscriminate mining of ground water has led to the decline in the water table as the withdrawal has exceeded the recharge of water and this has in turn led to a serious drinking water problem and an increase in the problem villages with no source of drinking water. The current drought has accentuated the problem of drinking water resulting in the necessity of despatching tankers to provide drinking water for man and beast in the States like Gujarat and Rajasthan. These measures have also proved inadequate,

28. Proper management of water resources would require a holistic and integrated approach towards water resource management. This has been recognised when the Union Ministry of Irrigation was renamed as Ministry of Water Resources and the National Water Resources Council was set up to prepare a National Water Policy. The policies have to recommend the priorities of the poor women and there should be a balance and coordination in terms of investments and programmes between this Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Department of Environment and Forest and National Waste Land development Board which has the responsibility of land management. The problem of pollution of ground water by numerous industrial units which has affected the quality of drinking water and inland fisheries through reduced flow in the rivers due to the construction of big dams and the economy of the small fisher women needs to be taken note of.

## FOREST

29. The lives of poor women are very closely linked with forest. The collection of fuel and fodder has become primary responsibility of poor women. They also dependent upon the



She treks long distances to collect fodder and fuel for the family.

forest for their raw material for carrying out their economic activities. However, in the recent times the process of deforestation has adversely affected women. They have to travel long distances to collect the fuel, fodder and raw materials for their requirements. While the minimum stipulation for forest according to National commission on Agriculture is 33 per cent to maintain the ecological and environmental balance only 23 per cent of the total land area of 325 million hectares in the country is classified as forest. Of the 19.52 per cent forest cover over 10 per cent is represented by closed forest, 8 per cent open forest, 0.12 per cent from mangrove forest, and 1.10 per cent is coffee plantations. The present official estimates also show that about 53 per cent of India's total landmass (329 million hectares) have been turned into wasteland and the states of Pajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra each have a degraded land of above ten million hectares U.P., Gujarat, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh each have degraded land above 5 million hectares. In the post-independence period between 1950-80, 15 million hectares of land under tree crops and groves and 5 million hectares of culturable wastelands which were the main source of fuel, wood and small timber were brought under cultivation. The country has been losing 1.5 million hectares of forest cover annually due to soil and wind erosion, water logging, salinity and shifting cultivation etc. As against this the total area planted during 1950-80 was only 3.7 million hectares and there are no realistic estimates as to how much of it has survived. The Parliamentary Committee in its 13th report to the Lok Sabha expressed concern at the constant increase in demand of forest land for non-forest purposes and observed that about 33,000 hectare of forest land has already been diverted for non-forest purposes.

30. The exploitation of forest for industrial and commercial purposes without an effective programme of regeneration of forest, developmental activities (irrigation, communication, mining) and neglect of village commons and grazing lands have resulted in depriving the poor women of the basic needs from the forest. The competing demands of industry like paper board, plywood and rayon grade pulp has correspondently reduced the availability of forest to the poor.

31. Another reason for rural and tribal poverty is the privatisation of common property resources in an inequitable manner. The common property resources are being usurped by private interests and the state through various Land laws, Forest Acts, laws concerning Minor Forest Produce, laws relating to water resources etc. The consequences are monetisation of non-cash economy in rural areas and most of the primary resources earlier obtained free, became commercialised. (fuel, fodder, timber, minor forest produce).

32. The Government has paying attention for re-building of forest resources. The social forestry programme was launched by Government in several States to promote afforestation on non-forest lands, private farms, village commons and government revenue lands. The way the programme was conceptualised, it has a definite slant in meeting the crucial needs of the poor and the landless households i.e. fodder and small timber. However, very soon the programme developed a slant in favour of the larger farmers, urban markets and industries.

33. Farm forestry has encouraged rich farmers to switch to cash generating tree plantation such as eucalyptus which is causing labour displacement and shift from food crops. The creation of village woodlots on village panchayat land is being throttled by village politics and distribution of the resources generated is not equitable, reaching the poorest last of all. Strip plantation is zealously guarded by the departments like railway & irrigation to which the plantation belongs and are finally auctioned off to wood based industries. Only in afforestation of degraded land has the forest department provided financial and material assistance to some poor families to afforest and protect till they acquire an income above the poverty line. However, this is being done only on an experimental scale and hence very limited and in any

case leave out those families who are not beneficiaries.

34. The general impact of the governments's afforestation policy is thus very negligible as far as the poor are concerned particularly women who are vitally concerned in getting their daily needs through bio-mass or biomass related products. Indeed one basic reason for rural and tribal poverty is the privatisation of common property resources in an inequitable manner. Common property resources were usurped by private interest and the State through various land acts, forest acts, laws concern minor forest produce etc. The consequence is monetisation of non-cash economy in rural areas and most of the primary resources like fuel, fodder, timber and minor forest produce which were earlier obtained free have become commercialised. Communities residing near or inside the forest were either evicted or denied access by designating large areas as reserved. In the exploitation of common property resources the women of the region has always played an important role. With the disappearance of the forests and increasing restriction on the use of common property, the women lost their cushion against scarcity. Environmental action groups have been focusing on the linkages between State policy, ecology and environment and the plight of million of tribals and forest dwellers dependent on forest. The real issue with these people is not compensation but recognition of rights, deforestation has not only meant depletion of natural resources but also destruction of the life style of these people. Afforestation has not affected them in positive way. They have made people who had prior access to land into a floating population of labourers devoid of any occupancy rights on the land they had lived for centuries.

35. There is need for a cordinated approach between the ministries and departments in respect of policies pertaining to natural resources. Owing to lack of coordination among operating departments sometimes these programmes run counter to each other as has been shown in a three states study on "Social forestry and Law," by the Indian Law Institute. This study pointed out that major problems faced by marginal and landless, farmers co-operatives, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and women is non-availability of land and information. Moreover people are opposed to using community land for non-grazing purposes since this is the only land available to them for animal husbandry. The bulk of the wasteland is available with the forest Department which is now governed by the Central Forest Conservation Act 1981. The report also noted that various laws pertaining to land use, came into conflict with social forestry policies.<sup>7</sup> The Bihar study found that most of the government owned wasteland is in fact in the control of rich landlords and politicians. The Forest Department has issued notifications to form Village Forest Committees to give pattas to carry out forestry programmes. The Revenue Department also issued a notification under the Revenue Department Programme to give pattas and form a different type of village committees. Both these notifications totally ignore the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act operative in South Bihar which has recorded rights of people on land as well as of the villages, to jointly use the forest.

36. The Commission studied the report of a workshop on "Womon, Social Forestry and Wasteland Development" organised by the CWDS. The Commission is in general agreement with the recommendations of the workshop. It was recommended in the workshop that the participation and involvement of poor rural women in such programmes can only be achieved through sustained financial, technical, managerial inputs during the process of asset creation, till these assets start giving returns. However, this calls for (a) organisation (b) essential support services such as child care (c) training needs identified by women from time to time, (d) developing women's awareness regarding their rights and responsibilities, (e) making available information and technologies and socialised services for women's drudgery reduction. The workshop suggested that since existing programmes do not make provisions for the above services, the programme designs should either be drastically changed or



modified to ensure proper co-ordination between different programmes and draw on these resources for providing essential support services.<sup>3</sup>

37. It was also suggested that the basic aim of social forestry should be to create village woodcots on a sustained yield basis and the programmes of social forestry and wasteland development should build in adequate wage and other technical and managerial support during the period of raising, maintenance and protection of plants since the poor cannot wait. Women's access to social forestry should be backed by state marketing supports. The workshop also observed that in all asset generating programmes, the issue of ownership, rights of disposal, choice of species, rights of harvesting, marketing and sharing of returns are extremely vague and unknown to people. A review of forest regulation is needed to push the basic strategy of community controlled and community managed social forestry and economic development system.

38. Apart from providing supportive services like training inputs, better technology and credit, it is essential that organising of women should be encouraged. The Chipco movement amply testified the collective strength of women even though they may be poor. When women are organised they also assume decision making responsibilities which are in keeping with their own priorities and needs.

## **Women and Industrialisation**

39. It is estimated that 90 percent of poor work in the informal and unorganised sector and only 10 percent work in the organised sector<sup>9</sup>. There is a preponderance of women workers engaged in agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing and allied activity, demonstrating that most of them are agricultural labourers. Women also labour in plantations, sanitary services, personal services which largely include domestic service, medical and health services, education, manufacture of beverages, tobacco and tobacco products and the like. In the manufacture of Textile products, chemicals and non-metallic mineral products women's presence is under 25 per cent.

40. In general it is seen that there is a concentration of women at the lower level of employment which indicates that they are assigned mainly unskilled jobs and that they are not easily offered promotions within the factory. Further, as modern capital intensive technology is introduced, women lose out because men are preferred to tend the new machines. Hence women have lost their jobs in textile industries owing to rationalization. This phenomenon of the displacement of women workers due to the introduction of modern technology is confirmed by the Labour Bureau study as well. The study report mentions that the Textile Labour Union in Ahmedabad and the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh in Bombay are concerned about the falling women's employment in textile factories and have negotiated settlements with employers to maintain at least the present level of women's employment. Such agreements will be effective if women are given opportunities to acquire modern technical skills. The Labour Bureau recommends that textile units should recruit only women so that entire shifts consisting of women can be operated. Sujatha Gothoskar in her report on women workers in the Pharmaceutical Industry in Bombay notes that the union leaders, do not display much enthusiasm for taking up issues of dwindling women's employment in the industry, the case for reorganising shift system on a six hourly basis and paternity grant and domestic leave for men to look after sick relatives. Gothoskar also reports that individual women cannot put across their point of view and mobilise union support in a male-dominated situation.<sup>10</sup>

41. While discussing the features of the unorganised sector, the changing relationship between agriculture and industry needs to be emphasised. Agriculture which almost entirely

belongs to the unorganised sector has itself become dependent for fertilizer, seeds, water and electricity on the government and on industrial enterprises in the organised sector especially in the regions where green revolution has had an impact. Consequently, agricultural productivity, the costs and benefits in agriculture are critically dependent on Government's decisions regarding the prices of inputs and outputs. Further, the Government's policies on rural development are restructuring the rural economy itself. For instance, fodder which used to be freely available to the entire village community has been converted into a priced input. The village poor who have no lands, find it difficult to collect fodder to feed their cattle or collect cowdung to make cowdung cakes. In villages where bio-gas plants have been introduced, those who do not own cattle have no free access to cowdung with which they make cowdung cakes. Access to fuel wood is also becoming difficult to the village poor with the restrictions imposed on the use of forest land by the Government. Hence the linkage of the rural economy to the organised sector and to the government for access to public resources generates a relationship of dependency on the Government. Thus, in sum we can say that the enterprises in the unorganised sector are linked by dependency ties to the organised sector.

42. It is important to note that policy changes and technological developments in the organised sector affect the unorganised sector, often drastically. Thus, if the textile manufacturers are allowed to import a few power looms it will imply that several hundreds of handlooms will go out of business rendering thousands of workers unemployed. Similarly, a decision to allow the production of combine harvesters will drastically affect several thousands of agricultural labourers in the country.

43. The organised sector is also linked to the unorganised sector in another way. Subcontracting relationships by organised sector help push labour-intensive process to the periphery allowing several of them to operate in the unorganised zone. These enterprises, mostly home based ones, flourish for so long as they are fulfilling the requirements of the organised sector enterprises. If the firm which puts out jobs, alters its product design or if it introduces new production processes, the smaller enterprises which are linked through subcontracting relationship may have to go out of business. Hence subcontracting relationships are particularly advantageous for industries operating under fluctuating market conditions. Subcontracting relationships allow expansion and contraction of production and shifts the costs of fluctuations to the vulnerable home-based units. That is why, in the field of garments manufacture and exports in India subcontracting relationships prevail and women fall victim to this system which is inherently exploitative.

44. The unorganised sector is characterised by heterogeneous and evolving labour relationships. Bondage relationships are giving way to market and contractual relationships. But bonded labour persists though on a low smaller scale especially in agriculture. In areas affected by green revolution or by the commercialization of agriculture a new phenomenon of contract labour has emerged. Labour contractors often from the ranks of labourers arrange to do specific harvesting transplanting or processing jobs at specified terms. The landowner does not have to directly recruit labour and supervise them besides having to pay wages. Besides agriculture, labour contracting is becoming popular in construction industry, and tobacco processing and curing. There are also self-employed workers to whom jobs are put out. These workers take the raw materials home to produce the required goods. Lace work, chikan work, beedi and agarbathi manufacture and garments feature in this type of work relationships. Another variation of sub-contracting is the workshop or community centre where the workers assemble to do the same job they were doing singly at home. There is also the casual labour system when free floating workers are hired at going wage rates in the market. The number of women is fairly large in these areas.

## Homebased Workers

45. An important category of labouring women are homebased workers doing a variety of activities like making bidis, food processing, garment workers, agarbati workers, spinners, toy making, fish processors, potters, basket makers, lace makers, zari workers. There is no authentic statistics available regarding the women household workers. In the 1981, Census, the number of workers listed under this head is 8.8 million whereas according the Ministry of Labour statistics, the number of bidi workers alone is 2.2. The Commission is of the opinion that the figure of 8.8 million is a gross-under estimation. One of the reasons for this is that this category of workers working in the precincts of their homes are not always visible.

46. Amongst the homebased women producers, apart from those doing their own account work, there is a large section of women doing piece-rate work. In the case of the latter the employer is in advantageous position to exploit the workers. He saves on over-hand costs, the women are at mercy of such employers as it is imperative for them to get work on any terms. The wages therefore, are very low. The workers do not enjoy the protection of legislation. A sad corollary of this system is that all the children assist their mothers in such work. The prevalence of child labour in this category is very high.

47. The process of industrialization has a bearing on increasing the number of home based workers. The industrial units specially small scale industries farm out work to women as it is financially advantageous for them to do so as mentioned earlier apart from not making investments in tools and investment. Women themselves are responsible for space, for work, lighting and other facilities which the wages do not take care of. In a study commissioned in this connection, Krishnaraj has pointed out that in the case of migrant cane bamboo workers lack of space is the main problem being faced by households. The increase in lawlessness and poverty are also contributing to the growth of household workers. These workers work for long hours in unhygienic conditions with poor lighting and ventilation. The Commission's own findings are that many times, women work upto 15 to 18 hours a day with their children helping them. This method of work denies women the opportunities of organising on work related issues. In case some women have the courage to organise, they are instantaneously deprived of work by the employers.

48. The future of home-based workers largely depends on Government's industrialisation policy and its recognition of home-based work as regular work. Piece-rate workers should be encouraged to do their own account work by providing package of incentives like helping them to acquire raw-material at reasonable prices, capital input (the amount required normally is very modest) at low rate of interest and marketing. However, since they are not in a position to take advantage of this facility because of the cumbersome procedures, the only alternative is to take loans at exorbitant rates of interest from the moneylenders which is not viable for them to carry on small time business. The package should also give help in providing work place and space to market their products. The Chapter on Legislative Protection has dealt with the legal framework related to homebased workers. Similarly, the need for providing viable options of work for poor women in order to enable them to resist vested interests has been brought out in The Grind of Work.

49. Workshops where women congregate do work which can be done individually at home affords greater opportunities for organisation. This workshop type of organisation is found in tobacco curing and processing and beedi making. Some voluntary organisations have also set up such units to undertake production of a wide variety of items ranging from pickles to the assembling of electronic products. In the workshops which are run by private entrepreneurs the wages are extremely low with appalling conditions of work. Women are open to sexual abuse as well. In the case of workshops run by voluntary associations or

charitable bodies, the profit-motive is however too weak to make such ventures economically viable. "We have the instance of such ventures sponsored by the Kerala State Electronic Corporation which have not proved to be economically viable". The only redeeming feature of this type of work organization is that it has the potential to organise women workers into trade unions. In Maharashtra there are many cases of successful trade union activity in the case of women workers involved in tobacco processing units.

50. Contract labourers especially women, are also vulnerable. The system of contract work exposes women to oppressive treatment and sexual abuse by labour contractors. The system often degenerates into a bonded system when the contractor also begins to lend money or advances, to the workers. In the contract labour system, it is extremely difficult to organise the workers into unions or even to ensure that the provisions of minimum wages legislation and other labour protection laws are complied with. Considering that contract labourers also happen to be outsiders to the region or village in which they are working, the contract labourers are treated with suspicion if not antagonism, by the local workers. Women as contract labourers are found in coal mines, as loaders in construction industry and in tobacco processing and curing.

51. It is in the casual labour system, however, that the workers especially women are most vulnerable. Here the worker is reduced to a free labourer depending for her sustenance on the availability of work for the day. If no work is available she may have to go without food for the day. An example of women casual labourers is the case of hand cart pullers of Gujarat.

52. To assess the impact of industrialization and industrial policy in India on women workers in the unorganized sector it is important to recognise that the industrial policy has a thrust towards introduction of modern industrial technology. As L.C. Jain puts it, the handicrafts are to be protected only on a temporary basis till modern technology based industrialization can absorb the growing numbers of workers in the labour market. Keeping this in mind, we can postulate that the conditions of work, the nature of work and wages in the unorganised sector will depend on the needs and demands of the organised industry<sup>12</sup>. This implies that only those enterprises in the unorganised sector which are complimenting the organised industry or those which operate in the interest of the economy can survive. Those enterprises which compete with the organised sector can survive only with government protection and subsidy and access of modern technology. Even here, it is not certain if such units can give a fair wage to the workers. In fact, it is for this reason that a committee set up on the working of the Khadi and village Industries Commission in 1976 pleaded that the Khadi units should be exempted from the Minimum Wages Act and the Equal Remunerations Act.

53. The dominance of the organised industry has been leading to the constant tendency to push down wages because the modern technology of organised industry continually displaces labour in the unorganised sector. The downward pressure on wages is likely to be borne by poorer women mostly because women's primary role to feed the members of the family and take care of them forces them to accept even extremely low wages. The men, who consider themselves free from such responsibility can often even turn down an employment opportunity if they consider the wage as too low. In this context women who are effectively locked up in their own homes doing home-based outwork are much worse off.

54. The encouragement given to small sector although welcome is reported to have led to splitting of large units into smaller ones, contracting and sub-contracting systems and growth of home-based industry. These forms of production are used as tools of avoiding labour laws and as means of exploiting workers, women workers being the greater sufferers. Women labour in the factory sector is also subject to casualisation, contractilisation and temporary employment.

55. Women labourers in the informal sector do not by and large have the advantages of maternity benefit, equal remuneration and child care facilities inspite of existing legislation. The implementation machinery is weak, legal procedures are expensive and cumbersome and women having no viable alternatives of employment are in no position to resist vested interests. The current processes of industrialisation have not resulted in any significant occupational, diversification of female labour force in the economy, women have penetrated only in a few modern industries, by and large they remain predominant in low-skilled work. Their role in management and decision making continues to be very limited and their employment status remains poor.

56. The policies and programmes of the Khadi and village Industries Commission deserve special attention in this context. The KVIC was set up in 1956 to carry on the work of rural reconstruction through development of Khadi and village industries, which had been initiated by Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle. The activities of the KVIC are important for poor women as one of its objectives is to provide employment for women at the doorstep. The major industries taken up by the KVIC are Khadi spinning and weaving, leather industry, soap making, bee-keeping, oil milling, rice pounding, woollen and silk textiles and other food processing activities. Studies of KVIC and KVIS (at the state level) have shown that employment provided to women is of a marginal nature which does not even ensure them the minimum wages prescribed for unskilled workers; the KVIC has made no efforts to provide education to women about their rights and responsibilities granted to them under the labour law; employment of KVIC guarantees no economic independence to women workers, as the incomes earned are very low, this tends to perpetuate the subordinate status of women workers, KVIC activities are not particularly directed to poor women belonging to SC/ST, Cost consciousness, technical management and general management needs to be improved.<sup>13</sup> Also important inputs like upgradation of vocational, management and entrepreneurship' skills for women need to be systematically promoted. Similarly, access to credit raw materials and marketing need to be expanded if the aim of improving the working conditions of these women is to be achieved.

## Handloom

57. Next to agriculture, handloom employs the largest number of women who are mostly engaged in pre-weaving activity, as part of family labour. A National Census was being carried out by the Development Commissioner of Handlooms. The results of the Census, however, were not available to the Commission. As women are engaged in pre-weaving activities, it is roughly estimated that their number may be between 30 to 35 lakhs. Although this sector has a potential for enlarged employment of female labour, it is facing a number of problems in the areas of technology, raw-materials and marketing organisations.<sup>14</sup>

58. A major policy thrust in this areas has been to organise the weavers, through the cooperative structures. The benefits like contribution to the share capital, subsidies for modernisation, marketing rebates are offered through cooperative structure. However, there has been no matching allocation of funds for extension and training for cooperativisation.

59. In a number of States, the States own cooperatives provide work to individual weavers and assist to market their products. However, non-availability of the benefits given to cooperative sector, higher overhead costs have diverted their focus to high value artistic products. As a result, the sustaining and increasing of income level and employment level has received low priority. Though most of the weavers' income and standard of living is below poverty line, the focus in policy making is not on wage-rate-revision, but on increasing their productivity through (a) modernisation of looms, (b) regular supply of yarn at reasonable price



Handloom is an important and potential area for employment. Though capable of working on a loom her efforts are normally concentrated on pre-weaving processes, which bring low remuneration.

(c) pre-weaving process facilities (d) improved quality and designs and (e) more efficient marketing facilities and strategies.

60. Such a policy package and resource allocation has partially worked to stimulate demand of high cost yarn and high value fabrics for urban elite and for export markets. The investments made and structures created have not helped the majority of cotton-weaving handloom weavers. On the other hand, the prevalent wage-rates do not take care of rise in cost of living, minimum need of an average weavers' household and comparative wage-levels of agricultural labour in rural areas.

61. Several studies of handloom weavers made in several talukas of Gujarat bear testimony to the downward occupational mobility and degradation of human resources, de-skilling and ruthless exploitation. In order to check the process of impoverishment, decline in the income and consumption level of the weavers, it is necessary to take measures like providing work round the year for weavers who have looms; the looms should be modernised; yarn should be provided at a reasonable price; rural marketing outlets should be provided; the personnel working in Governments Departments, corporations and cooperatives should be assisted by creche facilities and maternity benefits; women should be provided training on the looms and also in participating in primary cooperatives and in cooperative management.

62. In a labour surplus economy like India, introduction of high capital intensive technologies should be a planned exercise. Shift from labour intensive technologies in capital intensive technologies should be planned smoothly. Those who are working with labour intensive technologies, should be introduced and initiated into improved technologies. In the absence of planned transition, it may result into displacement of weaker sections like Scheduled Caste weavers and women. Training should be an essential component of such a transformation into modern technology so that the employment effects are manifested in the process along with technological development.

## Handicrafts

64. It is well accepted that handicrafts and rural artisan work are important for women because women are traditionally familiar with this work and can combine it well with the domestic responsibility. Handicrafts is defined as hand-made articles which are traditional and have artistic and aesthetic value.<sup>15</sup> One major problem that women in this sector face is getting a market for their products as they do not have access to the consumers directly. More attention is paid to export based handicrafts at the cost of other handicrafts. Consequently a number of crafts are neglected. Some crafts which can create mass domestic demand also are neglected in the process. There are also serious problems about supply of raw materials. Preference to the modern sector for raw materials, has frequently deprived small artisans and craftsmen of their access to local raw material.

65. SRUTI in a study on "Raw Material Availability Evidence from the primary survey" has pointed to the depletion of natural resources like forests and diversion of these materials to other sectors like paper factories which have led to a general scarcity of bamboo, coconut and palm leaves from which mats, baskets etc, are woven.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Maithreyi Krishnaraj in a study has recommended that raw materials should be provided through the public distribution system which would save the infrastructural cost of opening and running depots.

66. Women in the handicraft sector pre-dominate in areas where wages are comparatively lower like cork, bamboo products, agarbati making, earthen ware, pottery and coir products. There had been a growing tendency of a general shift to the urban areas, to non-household sector and male employment as brought out by L.C. Jain in his study on the handicraft industry 1955-85.<sup>17</sup> Nearly 2/3 of additional employment has gone to male workers. This is true of jewellery, carpets, embroidery, wood carving and musical instruments.

67. The domestic demand induced crafts have remained largely in household and rural sector which are favourable to women's employment and yet this sector has not received adequate assistance and protective/supportive measures. In the household sector as a whole, employment declined by 36 per cent and the severest decline was for rural woman (being 62 per cent). What women gained in non-household based manufacturing was less than what they lost in the household craft sector.

68. In the last few years there has been recognition of artisans and many of them have been given rewards and titles of master craftsman but a large number of artisans are neglected and even those who have been given one time recognition do not have any security for their old age. The commission is of the view that there should be a social security scheme for all the artisans so that when they stop working they have some financial security to live on.

## Licensing Policy

69. The Licensing Policy is a means of regulating the production of goods and services in the economy (quality and quantity of production, location of units and method of production).<sup>18</sup> It motivates people to produce the desired kinds of goods and provides disincentive for undesirable goods. It is thus a means of directing the economy in particular ways as desired by the Government and of following economic models for growing, for poverty eradication and for full employment.

70. The Licensing policy has been reported to be gender neutral in the sense that it makes no discrimination as far as the male and female division of labour is concerned. The priorities which influence the licensing policy are food self-sufficiency, export targets, transfer of foreign technology and import obligations, all of which has affected employment opportunities for women in traditional sectors as industries like fertilizer, pesticides, heavy chemicals, engineering goods and modern consumer goods take precedence over traditional



products. The licensing policy has to also re-examine the balance between use of muscle energy and use of machine energy. Indiscriminate use of machine energy as an indicator of progress could cause displacement of work opportunities. The licensing policy must also examine the choice of technology not only from the capital input-output and cost benefit analysis point of view but also from the point of view of displacement effect, of the reduction of autonomy over work for the majority of the reduction over control over resources for the majority. The licensing policy must understand the strong cultural preference for self employment in our culture and be able to respond to this preference through the introduction of suitable technologies.

71. The licensing policy must create enough opportunities for women's representation in the choice for technology in the uses of natural resources and in the use of energy and power. Women's choices tend to be different from those of men and this must be reflected in the licensing policy. It is necessary that the licensing policy like the industrial policy should incorporate the gender factor so that the interest of the women is taken care of satisfactorily and there is a thrust to enhance the employment opportunities with due regard to other relevant considerations.

**72. Institutional Fund Flow :** A study of the institutional fund flow of nationalised banks, Life Insurance Corporation, General Insurance Corporation, Industrial Development Bank of India, and State Finance Corporation in Maharashtra and Gujarat show that in agricultural production, funds have generally been used to commercialize agricultural output and mechanisation of agricultural production.<sup>19</sup> In fact this has reduced women's control over agricultural produce and small land holdings have become uneconomic affecting large numbers of women whose family land get sold off.

73. In the plantation and forestry sector, women are employed in plantation of tea, coffee, rubber, tobacco, nuts and fruit as casual or piece rate labourers. More funds in the plantation sectors does not affect women in a negative way since the process of picking and pruning are not mechanised. In case of forest, funds are mainly used to increase acreage under trees for commercial purposes, which gain precedence over fuel and fodder trees, preferred by women.

For food products, the encouragement of funds is mainly for mechanized production and the effect on women's works had been mainly displacement. Similarly, in textiles funds have been made available to composite textile mills and to powerloom units and processing units. Only marginal funds are available to the handloom and khadi and hand printing sector. As regards the other textiles like wool, silk and synthetic textile the bulk of the funds are diverted for synthetic textiles where very few women are working.

74. The flow of funds in the economy therefore does not go with the proclaimed policies of helping women or be conducive to poor working women as shown by the study of the 28 major group where women's work is concentrated. Relatively large funds (i.e. more than 2 percent in any year) have gone only to 11 groups and here also substantial funds have only resulted in displacement of women in their work. Even in Community Services, Social Welfare Programmes and Rural development Programmes where flow of funds is quite high and women have benefitted the extent and reach is limited.

75. As the finding indicate institutional fund flow does not encourage women's absorption into the mainstream of the economy. In this context the importance of individual money lenders gain importance. The large section of women are in the unorganized self employed sector or as casual/marginal labour where lack of credit forms a vicious circle that condemns them to the very last rung of the economy. Thus the thousands of agricultural workers, the vendors, petty traders and the poor service tenders like domestics, dhobis, Khana



walas etc. can never hope to release themselves from the clutches of the money lenders. Petty traders/vendors resort to the private lender who lends money at exorbitant rates of interest going upto Rs.10/- per day for Rs. 100/- for their working capital. The money lender thrives because of inadequacy of institutional finance, the long procedures involved, the security or security that is often called for and the generally unsympathetic attitude of the officer more interested in the overall turnover and recovery rates. This non-availability of institutional finance is inspite of the fact that the Government of India has articulated a strong commitment to providing the poor access to bank credit.

76. The policies relating to institutional funds flow need to be implemented in favour of women with greater amount of flexibility. Various experiments and innovation should be tried to improve the access of the poor women to credit by using the agencies like Mahila Mandals, women's groups, Anganwadi Workers, Women's Development Corporations and State Advisory Board as channels for getting the paperwork completed and thereby acting as intermediaries for loans advanced from banks to women. Similarly, more women's banks should be encouraged.

77. An exclusive credit for advancing loans to poor and self employed women need to be set up and the voluntary sector should provide support to such a body by acting again as intermediaries.

### **Raw-Materials marketing and other infrastructure:**

78. A large number of studies have shown that the common problems of the women in unorganised sector who are struggling to carry out self-employment works relate to raw materials, marketing and other infrastructural support. Raw material is the biggest problem of artisans and crafts women, as it is usually in short supply and expensive. They buy the raw-material from retailers at high prices and have to sell their finished goods to common people with low purchasing power. On the other hand cheap raw-materials like bamboo is provided to modern industries thus eroding the claims of actual producers and artisans,

79. Keeping in view the above actual producers and artisans should have the first claim to the raw materials at reasonable prices. Where raw materials are not easily accessible alternative channels should be identified through which raw materials could be provided.

In the case of marketing, the products which earlier had a home market are now squeezed out as a result of mass production of consumer goods, competition and stagnation in designing and quality. At haats and weekly markets are flooded by mass produced goods, women are forced to make distress sales in the absence of a network of alternate marketing facilities.

80. Marketing is a very critical area for women in the self-employed sector. Lack of access to markets has squeezed out large number of women from this sector and they have consequently become rate workers and casual labourers. Women should be provided support in marketing by identifying agencies which can act as marketing outlets and also assist women in identifying markets. A new structure for women should be provided in the States from the village level to the State level which will perform promotional role and also actively intervene in providing marketing network. In addition the Government itself can provide marketing facilities to women as it makes extensive purchase of goods produced by women.

### **Education**

81. Education is one of the important indicators of developments. This indicator amongst the labouring women is very low. Household responsibilities, specially looking after the younger sisters, brothers and assisting the mother in work situation wherever possible, prevents a girl child from getting education. Even though education is free upto secondary

level gap between the male and female education is wide. According to 1981 census 25 per cent of women are educated as against 47 per cent men. Similarly there is disparity between rural and urban areas. In rural areas female literacy is 18 per cent as against 48 per in urban areas. The drop out rates for girls are 68 per cent at the primary level and 77 per cent at the elementary stage. According to the new education policy there is a focus on women's education. The policy states

Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of education institutions.<sup>20</sup>

82. The policy also has recognized the need for having women teachers at primary level and creche facilities with primary schools.

83. One of the important impediments in the advancement of labouring women in poverty is lack of education and vocational skills which are necessary to acquire inputs in their work like credit, marketing, technology all these areas require skills in management and leadership which education is suppose to impart. Education, specially vocational education, should help to impart skills which would lead to diversification of activities amongst women to areas where there is potential for more employment with higher remuneration.

84. Through education women should be in a better position to better receive the message of development and to take advantage of developmental programmes. Education system for labouring women should be flexible to suit the needs of the girl child and for this shifts for girls would be desirable. This could be combined with providing a woman helper on an honourarium basis to take the girl child from the house to school and back.

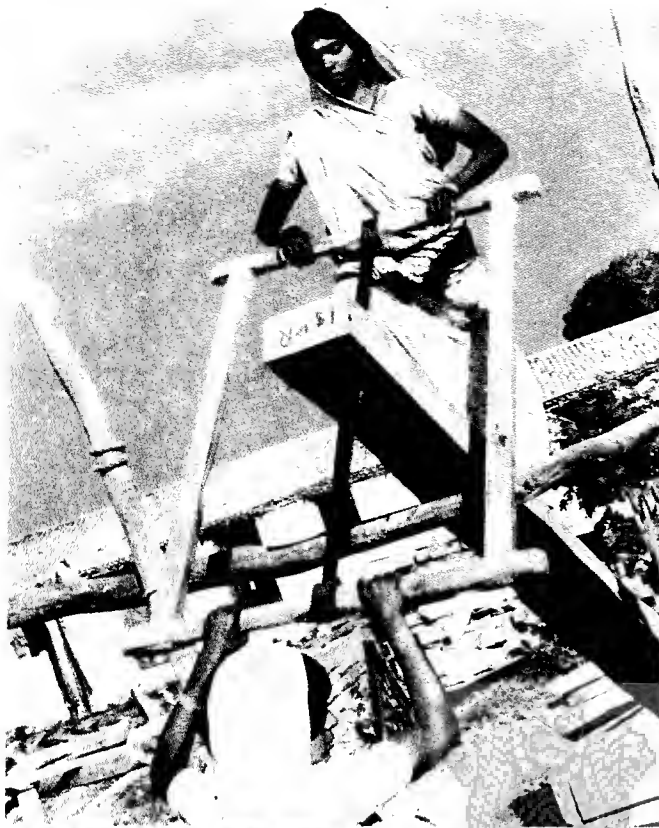
85. The syllable need to be more relevant for children of rural areas Practical subjects like animal husbandry, cattle care, agriculture, social forestry should be added to offer better choice to the girls of rural areas.

86. The programmes of the adult education need to be strengthened. A study which was commissioned for this purpose pointed out that the primer by and large except those in Tamilnadu are not relevant to women and do not deal with the women related issues. The quality of adult education as it exists is of a lower level then that available in the formal poor women in the shape of adult education, informal education and condensed courses which are being, carried out by voluntary agencies should be equal to those available and in formal system.

87. Greater emphasis has to be given on the vocational aspect of education. More experiments need to be undertaken to combine general and vocational education specially for the rural areas. Various alternatives of education need to be developed in a decentralised manner preferably within the area specific approach.

### **Training:**

88. Training policy flows from the technology policy The DGE&T in the Ministry of Labour, Government of India launched a special programme for vocational training for women with the assistance of CIDA and ILO. Under this project, National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI), New Delhi and two regional VTI were set up to provide training to women. At present, there is one national vocational training institute (NVTI, New Delhi), and six regional VTIS at Trivandrum, Bangalore, Bombay, Hissar, Tura and Calcutta.<sup>21</sup> In addition, there are 230



Given the opportunities for training she can diversify her activities and enter new areas of work.



Industrial Training Institutes/Women's Wing of ITI's in the country and Polytechniques for women. Training for rural youth for self employment (TRYSEM) and short training programmes of various Boards, also provide training to women. Though 51.2 per cent of ex-trainees were employed and though their average income was good, the training resulted in considerable wastage in some areas. Major reasons for the wastages were lack of demand for the skill, lack of adequate support for self-employment, inadequacy of training, and indifference of trainees towards the job (when they did not belong to poorer sections of the society.) For example, a large number of women take up tailoring and cutting work, but they cannot self-employment schemes successfully because the markets for the garments switched by them are limited. They do not have training which will help them to expand their existing ventures or start new ones which require skills in marketing, in acquiring credit in maintenance of accounts and procedures in project formulation. Thus training in growth of entrepreneurship organizing, general awareness, knowledge of legal matters is also lacking.

## Technology

89. As per the official approach, the technology policy in India aims at ensuring that our natural available endowments, specially human resources, are optimally utilised for a continuing increase in the well-being of the all sections of the population. However, in an industry has displaced women, who being in low skilled jobs operate in an area which is prone to be mechanized. Women being largely illiterate and untrained have little scope of learning how to operate the new machines or technical devices. The technological research also has not been directed to alleviating the drudgery of women, improving on specific tools and machines used by women or in the improvement of health and safety standards of women workers. Research for reducing of drudgery in domestic work has been limited to a few items like smokeless chullahs, gohar gas plant and solar cooker. The wider area of women's work has largely been left untouched. Similarly, in the area of occupational health hazards which the poor labouring women face have not been taken into account while introducing technology.

90. There are, some short-run measures which are recommended to protect women from displacement like directives should be issued to all industrial units, specially in the public sector, that no further reduction in the level of employment of women will be permitted; A small planning group should be set by the Technology Policy Cell to design a format, listing the criteria for evaluation of all proposals of technology transfer and automation in industries. So that a view can be taken with reference to women's opportunities for employment Schemes should be formulated for retraining women released from sick industries or closed industrial units. There is also a need to develop a long term perspective for technology for women. This could be done on the following lines:-

91. The Ministry of Labour should prepare a list of those sectors/industries which are presently labour-intensive and provide employment to sizeable number of women but are likely to be affected by technology transfer jeopardising their employment opportunities. In such cases, the pace and degree of mechanisation should be so regulated and phased out that women are trained on the job and be given other inputs like credit and tools.

92. Projects which result in the displacement of women should not be issued business licenses and/or founded or given concessions or subsidies by the Government, Banks and Corporations, unless the displaced women can be firmly rehabilitated in alternative employment. The displaced women should have the first priority in training for new jobs created by the new technology.

93. The Project Appraisal Division of the Planning Commission, in collaboration with the Technology Policy Implementation Committee, should formulate clear guidelines for the

approval of import of technology or automation in any given industry, by listing out critical issues to be considered in technology assessment and valuation.

94. The Inter-Departmental Working Group, set up by the Technology Policy Implementation Committee, to draw up guidelines for technology assessment and evaluation, and absorption of imported technology, has made a large number of recommendations (1985) which need to be implemented.

95. It should be incumbent on the employers to prepare a good feasibility report for submitting their proposal for a loan to the government for the purpose of technology transfer to indicate existing capital-labour ratio and changes expected after introduction of technology, present pattern of employment (sexwise) within the industry at the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled levels, and the demand for different categories of labour after technology transfer.

96. All technologies which are likely to directly and indirectly increase women's workload must be accompanied by other technologies or measures to ease or eliminate these side effects. In other words, a systems approach should be used to develop packages, rather than the current uni-dimensional approach. These multi-faceted packages must be gender-sensitive and women biased.

97. The development of new technologies for traditional, or even modern occupations, must be prioritised, beginning with woman's occupations. In other words, technology development must be selective, designed to impact positively on women's work, whether wage-work or non-wage work.

98. Development of simple or appropriate technology in the form of tools, implements and protective devices, to remove or reduce the work-related hazards faced by women, must be given top priority and taken up on a war-footing. Mechanisms must be created for involving the women themselves in the research and development process, so that the results are appropriate and useful to women.

99. An advisory committee, with some power of veto, must be set up at Central Government level to monitor the impact of technology on women. The Committee should also actively identify and promote the areas for research and development on pro-women technologies.

100. Existing technologies, which are not appropriate for women, though they are almost exclusively utilised by women (e.g. sewing machines, handcart pulling, table heights, cashewnuts, openers should be redesigned on a priority basis. The redesigning should be based on anthropometric measurements of Indian women.

101. Thirty-five per cent of all the research and development funds of national research and design institutes should be reserved for women's work, including occupational health studies, and working out changes in these for the convenience of women workers.

102. An important requirement in this context is of introducing in-built system of evaluation. The government agencies processing such proposals usually do not have adequate data on non-technical issues to give adequate weightage to them. Instead of doing a post-mortem analysis of the impact of production technologies on employment of women, there should be an in-built system of such evaluation. A multi-disciplinary group for technology evaluation may be set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour drawing expertise of several organisations within the government (including Planning Commission, economic ministries, financial institutions entrusted with the responsibility for analysing choices, women's Cell of the Department of Science and Technology, representative of TPIC training institutions and research and development systems) and from non-governmental organisations. Pooling together data and information, the report prepared by the Group should be given due weightage while considering proposals of technology transfer and should be disseminated

widely.

103. Technology being such an important issue has been dealt with again in the Chapters on Legislative Protection and Health focussing on the legal aspects and the occupational health hazards.

## **Anti-poverty Programmes for Poor Women:**

104. The strategy of direct attack on poverty was formulated in the early seventies and special programmes for the poor were introduced in the Fourth Five year Plan. However, when it was realised that "the poor" did not form a homogeneous group and that the different sections of the poor faced different constraints, specific programmes for various sections of the poor were formulated. Initially, special quotas (% of the total beneficiaries) were laid down for poor women, but subsequently, exclusive programmes for women were also introduced.

105. The present set of anti-poverty programmes can be broadly divided into the following broad categories:

- (1) Programmes providing self-employment to the poor.
- (2) Programmes providing wage-employment to the poor.
- (3) Special Area Development Programmes,
- (4) Programmes imparting training for skill formation and
- (5) Programmes pertaining to land reform.

The major anti-poverty programmes in the country are as follows:

- 1) IRDP: The main self-employment programme for rural areas today is the integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) which is regarded as "a major instrument of the Government Strategy to alleviate poverty." Its objective is to enable families below the poverty line to cross the poverty line through the use of productive assets.
- 2) DWCRA: In recognition of the fact that women have benefited only marginally under various rural development programmes a pilot scheme was visualised in 1982-83. This was to be implemented in 50 selected districts all over the country to give a boost to the involvement of women in anti-poverty programmes. Since reaching women in isolation was considered to be very difficult, it was decided to adopt a group approach to reach women in large numbers. Groups of 15-20 women belonging to families below the poverty line are expected to be organized under the programme for self-employment. These groups are provided financial assistance (loan and subsidy), technical assistance including training, marketing linkages and other follow up support to take up the selected enterprise successfully. The specific objectives of DWCRA are: (1) to improve women's participation in rural development, (2) to improve their earnings, (3) to help them acquire new skills, (4) to provide them better access to credit and to other social services, (5) to reduce their daily work-loan, (6) to establish meaningful linkages with various other programmes for the development of the rural and backward sections of the society and (7) to generate marketable output of women from these activities.
- 3) Wage Employment Programmes: Major wage-employment programmes which provide wage employment to the poor on public (and sometimes semi-public or private) works are National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme. A few states such as Maharashtra are also implementing the Employment Guarantee Scheme.
- 4) Special Area Development Programs: Special Area development programmes aim at developing backward areas which are normally by-passed by the general development process. The main area development programmes are Drought Prone

Area Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP), Tribal Area Development Programme (TADP), and Special Programmes for hilly areas and North-East Areas.

The programmes though well intentioned have not resulted in substantial benefits for women as is evident from the analysis of the programmes given below.

106. IRDP: As regards the performance of IRDP the data shows that the targets of 30 per cent of women beneficiaries has not been reached in the past few years. The percentage of female beneficiaries was 9.89 in 1985-86 and 15.13 in 1986-87. The data shows that the overall impact of this programme was only marginal on rural women. Mere 3.03 lakh women beneficiaries in 1985-86 and 5.67 lakh in 1986-87 hardly touch the periphery of the unemployment problem of women. The studies on IRDP also show that the access of the poorest strata of women and of female headed households to IRDP was poor. As far as the impact on terms of income generation is concerned, the studies show varied results: A study in Kerala shows net decline in the income of 18% female beneficiaries, (as the scheme did not work well, no change in come of 13% beneficiaries and more than 30 per cent increase in the case of only 4% beneficiaries. On the other hand, a study in Tamil Nadu shows highly positive results. (5) It is interesting to observe that men tend to dominate in decision making in IRDP schemes taken in the names of women. It can be also observed on the basis of the studies that successful cases of IRDP are found: (a) when the region is relatively developed (b) the female beneficiaries are educated, and (c) the scheme is high income generating. It seems that when the scheme is linked up with appropriate training and is supported adequately in the areas of marketing technology, credit and purchase, it tends to become successful.

107. DWCRA: The overall picture of DWCRA seems to be fairly satisfactory in the sense that the scheme has made good programmes in the last few years. There were 1000 groups of women set up in the first year of the scheme (1982-83), and the number increased to 4635 in 1984-85. Women have taken up traditional as well as non-traditional occupations under DWCRA. Women have taken up weaving, leaf plate making, bamboo work, vegetable vending, rope making, brick making, cosmetics, wire knitting etc. under the programme. DWCRA has had limited success as in most cases, it has not resulted in the growth of women's organizing capabilities and leadership qualities the programmes neglect requirements of women in the areas of child care and child development and over-all development of women of reducing through-reduction of drudgery and their organizations. Though at the objective levels, these requirements are accepted. The planning of the programme also does not take adequate care of the different components of self employment for example, the programme does not provide for adequate training for skill formation and for adequate qualitative and quantitative training in the areas of management including financial, marketing and overall management. It is observed by most of the DWCRA studies that the poorest women are usually left out from DWCRA groups and thus the programmes was to serve the better off among the poorer or sometimes non-poor groups of women.

108 (1) The participation of women on NREP is not much the percentage share seems to vary between 5% to 20% and in some cases it goes upto 30% or so. On the other hand, the participation of women in EGS is very high: in most cases it is above 50% and in some cases it is observed to be going upto 80% also. (2) It is worth noting that women workers on EGS are young, married and with children also. For example, a study shows that 44% women workers in Dhulia were between 15-30 years, 80% of workers were married, and 20% came from the families with 0.5 members (3) the impact of NREP in raising the average levels of employment and income has been negligible NREP has almost never provided continuity of employment to women. As against these, EGS has resulted in substantial increase of employment and incomes



of women, which have improved their consumption levels also. (4) The wage paid on NREP works as well as on RLEGP works have been observed to be less than the minimum wages. In the case of EGS, however, it is observed that frequently the wages are higher than the prevailing agricultural wages. (5) The amenities and facilities to be provided to women workers on these are usually not adequate, (6) It was observed, however, that women do not get as much employment as they want either because there are not enough men or because the works are not taken up in large number. It is important to note that widows or female heads of families found it difficult to get job on EGS works. (7) It is observed that all of the women's income on EGS is used for the wellbeing of the family, while a part of males' income is used to buy bidis or liquor. An important implication of this is that women's employment should be encouraged positively. However, the irregularity in payment of wage on EGS creates hardships for women. Sometimes women are forced to borrow from moneylenders at high interest because of the delay in payment of wages.

109. One major problem of planning for anti-poverty programmes for women is that there is an over-emphasis on rather too much it expects even the women from the poorest families are expected to take up self-employment. These women are observed to be unwilling or incapable of taking up self-employment because (a) they have low level of literacy and have meagre income of their own, (b) they have poor risk-bearing capacity and a low level of enterprise, (c) have poor credit worthiness and (d) they suffer from various socio-psychological constraints which come in the way of their taking up self-employment. It appears that self-employment programmes should be mainly addressed to the less poor or to the better-off among the poor. The second major problem with the designing of these programmes is regarding the inadequacy of these programmes to reach women. It is difficult to reach women because (a) the incidence of illiteracy is higher among women and they are less exposed to the outside world, (b) they have a lower status in the family and in the society, (c) social norms prevent them from freely meeting male functionaries and (d) because of these socio-psychological constraints, they are inhibited from taking up self-employment.

110. Unfortunately, the extension of the self-employment programmes, do not take care of these aspects. No special attempts are made to remove these constraints in order to reach women. The general strategy of extension and implementation has a male bias which neglects the needs of women with the result that not many women come forward to take up self-employment. It must be mentioned that unless the extension strategy is modified radically, poor women will not be helped much by anti-poverty programmes.

111. In addition, women also suffer because of the household approach of most self-employment programmes. The household approach identifies the head of the household—the man in most cases—as the main beneficiary. The scheme identified for the household therefore also is the one which suits the man. As the approach does not see the women the women of the household as an independent person or as a separate entity, it tends to ignore her claims as a beneficiary and consequently neglects her needs also. The male-orientation of these programmes is reflected in the identification of scheme, in the extension strategy and in the designing of the scheme.

112. The predominantly male ownership of family assets further restricts the access of women to self-employment, since they cannot take advantage of credit/loan schemes. Though it has been recommended that women (and the poor in general) should be provided bank loans upto a limit without any security, in reality bank ask for security. As women are not normally able to provide this security, they find it difficult to get loans for self-employment.

113. Apart from the above, there are some problems regarding the planning component of these programmes: These relate mainly to the identification of schemes for women,



providing support in the areas of technology and training and planning for purchase of inputs and marketing of goods. Some of the studies in these areas along with show that weak planning in adhocism in the approach considerably limit the success of the programmes.

114. Lastly there are problems arising from the indifference of the concerned authorities towards women's needs. This indifference is reflected in the low priority (and low financial allocation) given to women's programmes and in the lack of involvement of the machinery in carrying out these programmes. The planning and implementation of these programmes therefore lacks the required commitment. The programmes are also scattered and spread thinly with the result that they do not make much impact on the economy. The absence of separate date for women in most programmes, poor monitoring and almost total absence of official evaluation studies of the impact of these programmes on women all indicate the indifference as well as the weak planning and monitoring of these programmes.

### **Some Important Employment Sectors:**

115. In certain sub-sector like construction mining, domestic service, vending and hawking. Focuses on the realities faced by the workers, their living conditions, wages and the women are working in large numbers and chapter 3 vaibility of these sectors, and pertaining to women.

#### **Construction Activities**

116. Policies relating to construction activities have to take cognizance of the temporary and nature of this work and exploitative nature of- shifting of empolment under the construction system.<sup>3</sup>

117. Policy considerations relating to the construction sector have almost exclusively



**She leaves her home to do arduous work in exploitive conditions.**

pertained to non labour issues. A number of studies for instance, have been carried out on such problems like appropriate technology for building construction, manpower planning aspects, likely shortage of skilled manpower or considerations relating to financing and organisation of construction activities. These studies primarily emphasise the purely economic aspects of cost-effectiveness. These are no doubt important issues, but they completely bypass what happens to be our central concern here. i.e. the low paid, exploited, unskilled workers. Because unskilled labour is supposedly available at zero opportunity cost, no efforts seems to have been made in discussing the development of technology that may render the job of head-load carrying or stone-crushing the kind of operations that nearly 100% of our women construction workers are generally involved in, somewhat less strenuous, and hazardous, and more dignified. Such concerns are generally kept outside the purview of general policy making and are shoved under the blanket cover of 'social legislation,' which given the institutional frame-work of the industry as it is in our country is de facto non-binding and hence, non-functional.

118. The situation of women labourers doing construction work is particularly bad; They are forced to lead to a nomadic existence with a contractor in many cases not fulfilling his contractual obligations of providing shelter, water, toilet facilities, and child care facilities. Even ration cards are not available to these women. The Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act 1970 and the Interstate Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 are more flouted than enforced. The absence of workers' organisations further perpetuates exploitive conditions of the workers. The Commission during its visit to Tamil Nadu met the representatives of Construction Workers' Union, who are taking up matters relating to the working condition of women labourers. This subject has also been dealt with in the chapter on Legislative Protection which has discussed issues relating to tripartite boards, equal opportunities commission etc.

A comprehensive policy on construction which will keep the women workers as the focal point needs to be formulated.

### **Mining:**

119. In Mining it is not the lack of policy but the introduction of certain policies that have affected women's employment. The first macropolicy that affected women's employment was the Labour Laws which sought to protect the women from night and underground work but did not provide any alternative employment second had been the growth of industrial laws which benefitted direct recruits as opposed to contract labour. It thus became more profitable to engage a contractor than to hire labour directly. The most damaging policy however is the Voluntary Retirement Scheme for women. The VRS offered an evil choice for women; either she was retrenched or she retired voluntarily in favour of a male relative. In coal mining alone from 1975 to 1980 the number of women workers dropped by 30%.

120. The future for women in the mining industry as a whole is bleak. They are usually in unskilled jobs working under the contractors. Though the workers are governed by the Contract Labour Act of 1970, the Inter State Migrant Workers Act 1972 and others such acts their implementation is poor considering the capacity of the workers to go for legal redress. If contract work is regularized the women are pushed out of these jobs and history of falling women's employment in direct regular jobs stands to be repeated.

### **Hawking and Vending:**

121. Hawking and Vending has from ancient times been a legitimate activity and encouraged because of its utility<sup>25</sup>. Today, however, the main problem that is facing this sector

is that vending is regarded as illegal unless licensed by the municipality, since the vendors and hawkers come from the poorer classes, they lack the clout necessary to secure these licenses. The problem is most acute in cities. The problem stems from the attempts to impose the western pattern of urbanisation on the Indian cities, which have been characterised by the traditional markets. The present attitude emerged from the British system who brought with them the concept of the clean and broad roads without any 'obstruction'. From that time, vendors have been considered as nuisance—disturbing the city vehicles/traffic. In the absence of any alternative job opportunities such a policy amounts to harassment. The lack of national policy in this sector is thus acutely felt.

122. A policy for vendors/hawkers need to be formulated which must take into account the need to issue license and provide adequate market place. The Commission's visit to women's market in Manipur was rewarding. Such successful experiments need to be replicated. The policy should also take into account the small capital needs of the vendors. Measures should be adopted for safeguarding the women vendors and hawkers from exploitative money-lenders, petty officials in the police and local bodies

### **Domestic Services:**

123. Of all services in India Domestic Service is the most unregulated and disorganised<sup>26</sup>. There is a pressing need for the domestic worker to be recognised as a productive force in the labour market ensuring dignity of work and as workers secure for them a stronger position through organisations and through the provision of legislation. A number of organisations working to improve the status of women workers came as a outcome of the impetus received in the wake of the International Women's year and the Women's decade. In September 1987, a National Consultation for domestic workers was organised by the domestic workers societies in Delhi, where a draft bill was also tabled for discussion. In the process of empowerment, therefore, the provision for a protective policy and legislation from the State along with strengthening of the domestic workers collective bargaining capacity is a must.

### **Other Policies and Programmes:**

#### **Women's Cooperatives:**

124. The Cooperative Movement in India has had both success and failures. However, the validity of cooperatives for the poor to improve their economic status and working conditions in the self employed and handicraft sector cannot be questioned. The cooperative is an important instrument through which the poor can get access to credit, production inputs, marketing facilities etc. Cooperatives also provide a forum for the poor to get together and thereby acquire a better bargaining power. Alone and vulnerable the poor workers tend to get more exploited.

125. Corresponding to the number of cooperatives women's participation in cooperatives has also been increasing<sup>27,28</sup>. The number of exclusively women's cooperatives has also gone up. With diversification in the types of cooperatives being formed there is varied scope for improvement of women's socio-economic conditions, once they become members. However, many cooperatives fail to function efficiently and do not benefit the members very much, a vast percentage of the female population, who are in need of cooperative services remain outside the fold of this movement due to various constraints, some of which are to do with themselves, and some of which are to do with government policy, and the movement itself. These are discussed briefly below:

126. According to a study done by Samakhya for the Commission, much of the failure of the cooperative movement in India is due to the fact that Cooperative Laws do not encourage the spirit of voluntarism and cooperation. The gaps in the cooperative laws and suggestions to plug them have been brought out in the chapter on legislative protection.

127. Illiteracy is a crucial factor inhibiting women's participation, due to which a woman may fail to understand the potential of the movement for their own employment. Facilities for cooperative education and training are not adequate, as a result of which women are not entering the cooperative movement as much as they should. Those who do enter lack the confidence and training to participate fully, and even where participation is high success is not necessarily assured due to poor training.

128. There is a lack of proper leadership in the existing cooperatives. Often, a voluntary agency may organise women workers into a cooperative, helping them with registration and other procedural problems, and remain attached to the co-operative as an advisory body; however, due to lack of leadership training, and development of the workers, their role in decision-making remains minimal and the relationship between the voluntary agency and the cooperative develops into the employer-employee mode.

129. At the government level there are no specific schemes of financial assistance for women's cooperatives, nor special incentives to motivate women to form or join cooperatives. There are various schemes and agencies for providing financial assistance to the cooperative as such but women generally do not make use of such schemes because of the technicalities, complexities and inordinate delays involved in the whole procedure. On their own part, they lack adequate knowledge, about the various schemes available and their relative benefits.

130. Among different types of cooperatives, industrial cooperatives are preferred by women as they have greater prospects of generating additional income. However, they lack systematic links with the market in terms of both demand and design trends as well as sale outlets, even links with corporations are not systematic. Thus their business is handicapped and the society may become defunct after struggling for a few years, leaving the members frustrated and totally discouraged.

131. Since cooperatives are a means by which women can improve their economic well-being and gain in confidence and self-esteem, special policy towards increasing women's membership and formation of women's cooperatives is of utmost importance. The existing scheme of cooperative education for women should be given impetus at all levels. The broad objectives of the scheme are:

- to educate women in the cooperative concept and principle and potentialities of cooperation
- to acquaint them with their role in supporting and strengthening the society,
- to expose all women members in the managing committees to the provision of the Cooperative Act and Rules and Bye-laws, and techniques of cooperative management.

132. The State Cooperative Unions are the implementing agencies and are directly responsible for implementation of the program; at present the women's education program is being implemented in 16 States—this effort needs to be intensified and spread to the remaining states. For this, a large number of lady cooperative education instructors should be appointed. The women's education and development project in Kaira district can serve as a good model. Under this, women are educated in respect of scientific methods of dairy and animal husbandry as well as management of milk cooperatives. This project has gone a long way in creating consciousness and bringing awareness among women to which the success of the local dairy cooperatives can be attributed. It is vital to also include leadership development programs through the State Cooperative Unions, Cooperative Training Colleges and other such

centers, for the elected women director of cooperative organisations. The need for a training and awareness building program in a pre-cooperative stage is very important so that when the cooperative is eventually formed women are able to function systematically, they know what the procedures are and are able to take proper decisions.

133. In order to increase the representation of women, provision should be made in the Cooperative Acts, Rules and Bye-laws for reservation of seats for women in the Managing Committees/Board of Directors of Cooperatives; increased general membership of assetless women should also be stipulated. Also, where ever there is a provision for appointing government nominees on the Board, the government should, as far as possible, appoint women. At the State level there should be a Federation of women's cooperatives, which would provide guidelines to the women's cooperatives for organising different activities and for management development.

134. There are some areas where scope for women's cooperatives is best, such as in Milk Cooperatives, because dairying and animal husbandry are traditionally women's responsibility. Thus women should form at least 50 per cent of the membership and 50 per cent of the Managing Committees. Similarly the requirement for the Mid-Day Meal Scheme for school children should be entrusted to women's cooperatives. Some areas where women do not play much of a role but where their participation is desirable should be developed; for example in the formation and registration of urban cooperative banks, the Registrar should provide bye-laws specifying that at least 25 per cent of the women members are there as promoters at the time of registration, and at least 10 per cent of the total finance should go to women for their home-based industries, self-employment and creation of assets.

135. The most basic change that is required is a review of all existing legislation according to the internationally accepted definition of cooperatives as the guiding principle; particular attention should be paid to the needs of the assetless, unorganised poor. It is a fact that as matters stand cooperatives have most often failed rather than succeeded and such a widespread lack of success has gone toward building up a wariness and disinterest towards this movement

## Urbanization

136. Urbanization has put severe strain on job opportunities and new stream of migrants are forced to take up whatever jobs are available. In this context, the impact on urbanization on women has been variable. It has had a positive effect on the general status of women as evident from the indicators of health, education and the physical quality of life.<sup>29</sup> Better health status is reflected in the lower rates of infant and child mortality, better access to health facilities, better care of female child and higher age at marriage. It has promoted literacy, education among women as evident from the enrolment of the girls and schools, their entry into higher education and some growth in their share in professional fields. It is, however, in employment where urban females are at a disadvantage both in comparison to rural females and urban males. Female work participation rates in urban areas are low. More women are being pushed into the sphere of casual labour.

137. The living conditions of migrant women and casual labour is quite deplorable. They mostly live in over-crowded slums with lack of ventilation, light and toilet facilities. Living in unauthorised areas, they constantly fear evictions and demolitions. This situation is exploited by local thugs. It also diminishes their work opportunities as they cannot set up any permanent work-base.

## Housing

138. Housing for the poor has been recognised as one of the basic requirements of

human life<sup>30</sup>. For women, housing has an added dimension, since, traditionally they rarely own land or house. It involves more than a roof over head, as it includes social and community facility and it connected with employment and earnings. As women spend most of the time within the home specially, those who are home based workers who use home as their work place housing is of crucial importance. The provision of housing has to be considered in the urban and rural context separately as the situation prevailing in both is quite different.

139. In our major cities, more than 30 per cent of the population lives in slums, where they face terrible overcrowding insanitary conditions, lack of essential services, terrorization by local thugs and the constant threat of eviction and demolition.

140. In rural areas, the progressive destruction of natural resources has led to a crisis in land availability and local construction material. Moreover, the rural houses have no sanitation and inadequate ventilation. A general problem in both rural and urban areas is that given the shortage, far short of requirements and speculation and profiteering leads to resale of houses in low income groups to these in the higher income groups leaving them homeless again. Some positive action has been taken as funds allocated over successive Five Year Plans have increased vastly. The Sixth Plan Document has declared that the 1990 all landless workers will get complete housing assistance, free sites as well as contribution assistance alongwith minimum infrastructure like water, toilets and approach road. But the target is nowhere near achievement with expenditure falling below 50 per cent. This is mainly because of unsuitable location of housing sites, low community participation and periodic non-availability of materials and standards connected with housing.

### **Childcare/Daycare Services:**

143. In the families of the poors, all the able-bodies adults, and often the children as well, have to be engaged in some form of economic activity, be it monetised or not. For



From childhood she is burdened with the responsibilities of motherhood

example rural children may be involved in the taking out to graze, collecting fodder, firewood and water, or in urban areas, working in industrial set ups, like electronics workshops<sup>31</sup>. Especially for children from families that are always on the move, such as construction labourers, the disadvantages are multiplied, children suffer the effects of malnourishment, over-crowded and unhygienic living conditions, lack of opportunities for formal education, and inadequate adult attention and care.

144. Childcare is thus an urgent need, since—a) the woman bears a triple burden—as worker, homemaker and mother, (b) the child suffers the double disadvantage of poverty and working parents (often within a nuclear family and (c) the girl is deprived of schooling as she is often the child caretaker and home helper, it is critical component of any attempt to increase women's economic participation and involve women more fully in the development process while providing relief from childcare, and enable girls to go to school. Many women who are now forced to accept piece rates as home-based workers (being unable to leave small children to go to a workshop or factory) would be in a position to improve their economic status.

145. Childcare programmes should, therefore, integrate the needs of women, older daughters and small children. Programmes for women's development have so far been concentrated in the areas of literacy, education and vocational training, awareness of the importance of support services and, especially those that reduce domestic drudgery, has developed very recently. Provisions for childcare exist only in the organised sector and these are limited in scope, custodial in nature and under-utilized as they are not geared to women's real needs. Except for a few programmes by private or voluntary agencies there are no instances of schools offering childcare for younger siblings as a support for girls in schools; the New Education Policy (1986) does mention their need towards achieving universalisation of primary education, but it is not known what, if any, concrete steps have to far been taken in this regard. Another reason for non-attendance of school by rural children, is that school timings clash with timings of their daily chores for example, the older daughter may have to take on the duty of childcare during the hours that her parents work as agricultural labourers, and there are also the hours for school. The majority of childcare services involve children to the exclusion of their parents, at the same time assuming that the mother's primary role is that of homemaker and parent.

146. Existing day care services for young children of working mothers may be grouped under three heads: Statutory, voluntary and public.

Statutory: Legislation that provide for creches for women are the Factories Act (1948), Plantation Act (1957), Mines Act (1952), Contract Labour Act (1970), Inter-State Migrant Workers Act (1980).

Of these the first three refer specifically to the organised sector. Except in the case of mines, above a specified minimum number of women workers it becomes obligatory for the employer to provide a creche; in mines a creche is obligatory if even a single woman worker is employed. However, observance of these requirements is rare and the quality of services generally poor, which leads to their under-utilization. In most cases the law is evaded or often, ineffective provisions are made to avoid hiring women, or if they do employ them, keep them scattered, temporary, or casual.

Voluntary: The main provision is through the governments "Scheme of assistance to voluntary agencies to provide creches for working/ailing mother", launched in 1974. Creches are run by voluntary agencies with financial assistance from the Central Social Welfare Board for poor working women in the unorganised sector. At present there are only 10,000 creches catering to about 2.5 lakh children of 0-6 years age, though most children are between 3 and 6 years age since creches lack the space and equipment and workers lack the time and training,



for infant care; thus they function as low quality preschools as balwadies.

147. Most of these are concentrated in 9 states, that too, in urban or semi-urban areas, catering to working and non-working women, often in groups above the poverty line. Exception in Tamilnadu, day care for the whole day or for the hours, actually required by the working mother is infrequent, and only one snack can be served to the children: these problems are due to financial constraints, since funds allocated are inadequate there are procedural delays in their release and the scheme does not permit fees to be charged. There is no evidence that mothers have been consulted and services planned to suit their needs. The rigidity of the scheme makes it difficult for all but a few exceptional agencies to provide a flexible effective and used-based programmes.

Public: The aim of the ICDs—Integrated Child Development Services—is to reach all children in the poverty group and, ultimately, to reach all children in the community, services include supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-up and referral for all children below 6, and for expectant and lactating mothers, non-formal preschool education for children 3-6 (in Anganwadis) and nutrition and health education and functional literacy for women. The worker-child ratio is 40 or 50, there is hardly any play equipment, very little space, the Anganwadi runs for a few hours in the morning in an angan or courtyard, in the worker's home, under a tree, or in any open space available. The scheme was not designed to provide day care services, but the services that are offered often fail since they are not co-ordinated with the needs and timings of the mothers, who are expected to attend afternoon sessions on nutrition, and health education, and functional literacy and to be present at home in the afternoon when the worker makes home visits. In practice major childcare duties may be performed by an older daughter and thus the working mother herself cannot be in contact with the programme of all the services, immunisation and supplementary nutrition have had some success, while the other generally fail due to constraints of finance, training, personnel, time, space, equipment.

148. The worker has so many duties of many varieties that she alone, on a salary of 6.275 per month should not be expected to do a satisfactory job, and the scheme itself, being applied nationwide across a vast variety of contexts, must fail to respond to local needs.

149. A two-fold approach of renovation and innovation may be adopted.

Renovation: This would involve modifying, strengthening and adapting the existing program for greater effectiveness.

150. Creches must be increased in numbers as well and made more effective in the following ways:

- a) Proper Training for creche workers and supervisors to ensure that the objectives of the scheme are fulfilled.
- b) increased wages for creched workers commensurate with working hours.
- c) insistence on linkage with mothers to ensure that their needs are met and timings coincide with their working hours.
- d) Community contributions in cash and/or kind. The program must be as per needs of the target group and be acceptable to them.
- e) provision of adequate, drinking water, play material and toys
- f) provision of adequate nutritious food in the duration of the creche hours.

ICDS: A fixed percentage of ICDS centres are to be upgraded into-day-care centres; this has been stated in the Program of Action of the National Policy on Education (1986) though it is not known whether the process has been initiated so far. Basic changes should be the provision of an extra worker, and increased remuneration. Other requirements for developing



an anganwadi center into a day care center are given in the above mentioned document, as follows:

- a) timings co-terminous with school hours or mothers working hours
- b) adequate, safe and hygienic space
- c) adequate child worker ratio
- d) drinking water
- e) supplementary nutrition (for the required duration)
- f) para medical care under medical supervision
- g) minimum equipment including linen, cradles and infant needs.
- h) toys and play materials
- i) training and supervision of workers.

If these are followed and targets set realistically a good beginning would be made in increasing childcare facilities for working women. Proper training of worker and high quality of supervision involving expert support and guidance are of prime importance.

### **Innovation:**

151. Scope should be permitted for more diverse and novel programmes to develop out of local needs and resources, such as the following. In all cases the creche worker should stay in close touch with the local health services.

- a) Family-based day-care: A local women belonging to the same community and socio-cultural background as the mothers may be encouraged to take children into day-care in her own house, depending on the space available and the possibility of an additional helper. Since such persons would usually have low educational qualifications voluntary agencies could identify such women and provide them with the needed guidance, funding, training and support.
- b) Social-base day cares: The local primary school may offer space and employ a local women worker to take care of the younger siblings of girls attending elementary school. As this is an institutional approach training materials, equipment and supervision would have to be in proximity which will enable the older children to keep in touch with their siblings and to help in their care when needed.
- c) Women's-organisation-based day-care: All women's unions co-operatives or other such groups should be encouraged to run a child-care programme, located at either the workplace or the residential locality, according to the women's preference. For a small group it may be necessary for an organisation such as a voluntary agency or a public sector corporation to act as intermediary in providing funding, and guidance.
- d) Mobile day-care units: These are required for itinerant women workers, such as those employed along roads, canals and railway tracks, whose work/residential area may shift frequently. Wherever possible the women in the work force should themselves be utilised as day-care workers. The employer should provide the funding, but a voluntary agency would handle the supervision, guidance and training of the actual program.

Other special models may be devised for particular groups like:—

- women home-based workers
- seasonal agricultural workers, and
- ailing/hospitalised women

their needs may be incorporated within other existing programmes.

Organisation: The vast diversity of socio-economic occupational geographic, ecological and cultural contexts in the country in addition to specialised circumstances such as migrancy,

nomadism, seasonal employment, remote and poor communication in some areas means that local groups who know local condition must undertake the work with minimal monitoring. They would need inputs from outside, such as funding training, information, and guidance, at the same time their autonomy must be respected, and local leaderships and initiative allowed to develop. A three tier structure is suggested:

- a) Local Level: to organise the child care service. May be unions, co-operatives, clubs, Mahila Mandal or panchayats.
- b) Intermediary level: to be responsible for fundings, channeling resources, training, and supervising. May be voluntary agencies, public sector undertakings, Zila Parishads, trade union or municipal authorities.
- c) Apex level—an umbrella organisation at national and state levels to develop, fund, train and evaluate childcare services. It may have an autonomous structure, either as a corporation or a Board similar to labour Welfare Boards, and function under the joint auspices of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Education, and Labour. It should be concerned with both renovative and innovative aspects, such as
  - Strengthening, modifying and adapting existing programs like ICDS and creches
  - developing new and diverse models of child-care suited to women in different situations and supportive of girls education;
  - channelling funds through the intermediary agencies, providing resources for training trainers, developing training materials, supervising, monitoring and evaluation.

153. Finding: Funds should be drawn from three sources—the employers, the Government and workers or parents.

Employers contribution may be in the form of a welfare cess to be uniformly applied to all employers regardless of the numbers employed and the sex of the workers employed. In the case of large companies in the organised sector, it may be relatively easy to adjust the cess according to the numbers employed, but in the case of the small-scale sector this would be difficult to assess and to collect. The same problem holds for home-based workers and the self-employed. Hence it is suggested that output be taken as the criterion for the cess in all cases. Only the very small enterprises need be left out due to reasons of administrative difficulty and cost, while co-operatives, voluntary agencies and charitable institutions would all be included.

Government contribution: Since there is a support service for working women, school-going girls, and children, funds should be drawn from the budgets of the Ministries of Labour, Women and Child Development, and Education respectively.

Workers/parents: In the case of the organised sector, a contribution may be made by the trade union (if any). In other cases, the women workers/parents may make contributions at the local level directly to the child care service.

These are some of the possible alternatives, for a nation wide movement, consultation of experts should be set up by concerned ministries in interaction, to go into the specific local problems and solution.

154 Maternity Benefits is another input which provides financial support to women when they do not work during the child birth, and also provides better health support to the mother and the child. This facility is at present given mainly in the organised sector (and that too to permanent workers) and a large number of women workers are excluded from it. Kerala, Karnataka and Gujarat have introduced schemes to provide the facility to landless workers in

rural areas. There is a need to do this in other states as well. There is also a need to provide this benefit to a large number of other workers in rural and urban areas. Attention should also be paid to improving the working of the present schemes and using innovative methods of financing them.

A large number of women's activities are left out of Government policies and programmes because these women workers are invisible to the government. These women who are employed as domestic workers, vendors and hawkers, construction workers, fisher-women, washerwomen and miners are almost completely left out of the purview of developmental planning. These women can be helped by (1) legal protection, (2) welfare programmes, (3) programmes of literacy (4) skill training and (5) other supports such as extension, finance, marketing etc. Appropriate detailed steps should be designed for each of these invisible women's groups. It should be seen that all these workers are recognised as workers in statistics and in government policies, they are protected from exploitation of various kinds and they get access to upward mobility by taking advantage of facilities for training, credit, marketing and so on.

### Summing up

155. The discussion in the previous section of the Chapter have shown that on one hand unprotected women workers are invisible or less visible, easy subjects of exploitation, unorganised, illiterate and ignorant, struggling to survive in adverse conditions and are facing biased and insensitive official, while on the other hand macro policies and programmes, although well-intentioned have not resulted in substantial benefits to them. A strategy that aims at helping these women should ensure that development processes bring the labouring women in the mainstream of development.

156. The labouring women should be in the the focus of the planners and implementors not only because their poor conditions warrant so, but also for the reason that they make a substantial contribution to the family and national economies. While the work put in by the women and their earnings meet the survival needs of the family, their contributions in the fields of agriculture, food production, forestry, animal husbandry, industry, processing occupations etc. contribute to the growth of GNP, thereby making a direct contribution to the national economy. It is not possible to quantify the contribution which these women make to their families and national economy as women do multifarious activities some of which are not paid. In addition, women spend a considerable amount of time on performing social functions and doing family chores which cannot be given a price tag like bearing and rearing children, fetching water, fodder, fuel, doing cooking, washing, cleaning, looking after the aged the sick. There is no doubt that the women's contribution to the family and national economy is much more than their actual earnings. Attempts need to be made to quantify their contributions in this regard.

157. The broad characteristics of a strategy which would be in the interests of poor women should aim at development process which takes care of the interests of all groups of people, specially the poor, including poor women. The strategy should aim at meeting the needs of the poor, such as ensuring them employment and minimum earnings, providing them the basic necessities of life and protecting them from all kinds of exploitation. As regards women, the strategy should aim at (a) ensuring them fuel, fodder and water for meeting their basic requirements, (b) strengthening their existing employment by providing appropriate support in the areas of skill, training, credit and marketing, (c) protecting their employment in the sectors where it is declining due to technological advancements, (d) creating new employment opportunities for them locally based on local markets for mass consumption

goods and (e) protecting women workers from casualisation and contractualisation which lead to their exploitation, (f) provide supportive services to women like housing, toilets and child care facilities, (g) proper and effective implementation of industrial and protective legislations.

158. To meet this above objective, the first step will be to formulate a set of macro policies in various areas which are well-integrated with each other:-

- a) This will call for formulation of an integrated strategy for the use of natural resources like land, water and forests keeping in mind the fuel, fodder and water requirements of the poor. For example, irrigation schemes should not destroy land and forests: forest policies should not hurt the interests of the poor and land use policies should aim to meet the fodder requirements of the poor also.
- b) An integrated strategy for industrial development also will have to be formulated so that the three sectors of industries, namely the large scale sector, the small scale sector and the traditional sector coexist in a healthy fashion. Expansions of large scale industries, for example, should not result into erosion of the employment opportunities for women of the traditional sector.
- c) The industrial policy will also have to be linked meaningfully with the policy pertaining to natural resources so that the resource use is directed towards creating employment opportunities for the poor, specially for women who should also not be deprived of raw materials because of competing demands of the industry.
- d) Anti-poverty programmes will have to be strengthened in the light of the above policies so that they supplement and complement the development process.

In view of the above, the individual macro policies of the line departments should have a greater trust on poor women needs. The technology policy, the licensing policy, the credit policy, and policy pertaining to training, marketing and raw materials will all have to be reformulated to meet the new needs.

159. The third component of the strategy will be to improve the visibility of unprotected women labour. This can be done by (a) improving the data base on women labour so that their contribution to economic activities, to, GDP and to family incomes becomes visible, (b) recognising the role of women in the economy and interpreting development as a process of growth with social justice to all the sections including women as a separate section and by (c) improving the sensitivity of the officials towards the specific constraints and potentials of women.

160. The fourth component of the strategy would be directed to empowering women as to improve their access to development. This will involve (a) political empowering by encouraging their organisation, (b) improving access of women to assets by giving them joint ownership in assets, (c) improving their access to information and education, credit, technology and skill training, and other infrastructural facilities and (d) recognising the need for involving them and their organisation in policy making at various levels.

161. The strategy will have to be further supported by a good organisational network to take care of various aspects of the requirements. For example, the organisational set up will have to be strengthened in the areas of credit, technology (R&D), skill training, raw materials, extension and marketing at various levels so that these are easily accessible to women. Strengthening of the machinery for evaluation and monitoring will also be an important component of this network. In addition to these, women's organisations like Mahila Mandals, Cooperatives and Unions also will have to be supported and strengthened.

162. The strategy will have to recognise the role of NGOs in reaching poor women and in promoting various developmental activities for the benefit of women. The experience of women's organizations in India have shown that these organizations can play a very important

role in women's development. There is therefore, a need to recognise their role officially and to encourage their involvement in various activities. There is also a need to provide them support in the areas of training, technology, credit, and marketing and to involve them in decision-making processes at various levels so that the interests of poor women in programmes and policy making, are not overlooked.

It is obvious that such a strategy requires good amount of determination, will on the part of policy makers. It also requires clear prioritisation and a systematic approach towards development planning.

163. Policies relating to legislative protection, occupational health and communication network systems having considerable impact on labouring women's work and life situation. These being critical areas have been taken up suitably in subsequent chapters.



# 5

## LEGISLATIVE PROTECTION

**C**ontrary to the popular myth, every woman is a worker. Her work embraces a multitude of functions of vital social and economic importance. She not only bears children, she also rears, trains, and socialises them thus imparting basic skills and information to the future workforce of the country. She nurtures and provides a multitude of services to her family. She refines and adds value to unfinished or semi-processed goods/commodities from the market into useable goods for the family. And in almost all instances, she contributes directly to the family income by the production of goods and services which are sold in the market. In most household economics, it is the contribution of the woman that enables the family to survive, and invariably, her entire income goes towards this, in contrast to the male's income which is always partially if not wholly, retained by him for his personal expenses: cigarettes, bidis, alcohol.

2. The direct participation of women in the market economy however is very often overlooked. Women's work and contribution are obfuscated by terms like "housewife", "leisure time activity", and "part-time work", and their economic role devalued by concepts like "helpmate" and "supplementary income", propagated by a patriarchal, male dominated society. These attitudes moreover are internalised by the women, lending to low self-esteem and self-worth.

3. The marginalization of women is not a phenomenon confined to India or even to the developing countries. The invisibility of women's work and its exploitation are as rampant in the most progressive nations as in the least developed. The invisibility of women's labour, the atomisation of the female force by restricting it to the physical confines of "home", the powerful ethos of privacy surrounding the home and the activities conducted therein, the inability for all these reasons of women to organise effectively—these are universal. The world economy as it stands today is built on the unpaid labour and misappropriated and ruthlessly

exploited natural and human resources. Of these, women's labour forms a major portion. This reality is evident in the fields, the fish markets, home based sweet shops, or in the factories and "export promotion zones" of the third world. It is no secret that third world workers are subsidising the developed nations with cheap commodities and services. The economic colonialization of these countries has not ceased with political colonialization. Rather it has intensified and become more insidious. Experiences in all developing economies are dishearteningly similar. With the increased participation of their economies in the world markets, there is a compulsion to compete in profit oriented production. It is necessary to minimise costs. Inevitably the axe falls on the most easily exploitable resource, and women are forced into their production process at the very lowest level.

4. For any meaningful change to occur in the national and international economies, basic trends of production and marketing, certain norms of growth evaluation and development will have to be drastically revised.

5. Today, institutions of society, economics and politics are dominated by the values of patriarchy. Progress, and development are evaluated on grounds of asset ownership and material wealth. Politics is dominated by the drive to control as many as these wealth generating assets as possible. Social norms lay stress on the acquisition of wealth and power. Women have been taught that it is their role to be continually supportive of these values while reaping only those benefits that accrue incidentally through association with men. Control does not lie with women. What is universally called for, therefore, is the empowerment for women, enabling them to participate wholly and without restrictions in the developmental process.

6. The definitions of 'work' and 'production' as they exist today, whether in the Census or in other surveys on work, are such that subsistence production and services provided by women



Even where legislation provides for childcare facilities, she seldom benefits from them.

are either ignored or taken into account only marginally. Consequently, the results of these surveys tend to reinforce the traditionally held view that women, more often than not, are non-workers, whose primary responsibilities are household work and caring for children. This, as any rational person would admit, is at total variance with the prevailing situation.

7. Existing laws relating to asset ownership and land contribute to this image of the woman being a non-worker. Because land is owned by the man, the woman has little control over its use, retention, or sale. Though she is aware that growing food crops on the land would enable the family to survive, she very often has to bow to the judgement of the man and grow cash crops instead. In obtaining loans or grants as well, it is rare that officials accept women as loanees. This is despite the much higher rate of recovery of loans from women. The ostensible reason for this is again due to the fact that assets are not in the women's name, and because, despite all evidence to the contrary, the stereotype of women engaged in some frivolous pastime, making some "side money" distorts the thinking.

8. Due to the atomisation of women's labourforce, moreover, it is very difficult to organise any kind of collective activity that could possibly result in an improvement of her status. Individual women are isolated by tradition and cultural factors and the piece rate system, being mainly home based, takes advantage of and supports this isolation. In addition, the desperate need of women to augment their income, the easy availability of labour and the rapaciousness of many employers combine to make these women compete with each other rather than find support through collective action. There is an imperative need for organization, therefore, in order to reduce the dependence of workers on the employers and enable them to gain more financially.

9. Today women are marginalised and alienated from modern technological production processes. In fact, ironically, technological advancement has invariably resulted in increased marginalisation of the female workforce. On the job skill upgradation opportunities are restricted to men, while the women are either eliminated from the production or downgraded to jobs requiring manual skills. In every sector—primary, secondary or tertiary, this has been the pattern. The introduction of mechanical farm equipment has upgraded male labour into tractor drivers or the equivalent while women are restricted to menial, physically arduous tasks such as rice transplantation. In factories, men are taught to operate machinery, while stitching buttons or other labour intensive, low status and poorly paid operations are left to women. The home based work system further isolates women from the technology they would automatically be exposed to in a factory, for instance: It is essential therefore, to open avenues for women to be exposed to, experience, and learn to work with modern technology. This technology is also eminently suited to use by women, not requiring intensive physical strain, not that this has been a criteria of excluding women from such occupations, ever.

10. Because of the close interrelation of all these issues with the status of women workers, it is not impossible to talk of legislation and legislative protection for women workers, without dwelling on these issues as well. In the following sections therefore, in addition to labour and other laws, some of these important issues relating to poor women workers have also been discussed.

## **Laws Affecting Status Of Women Workers**

### **Labour Laws**

11. While the number of labour laws that are in the statute book is very large, it is adequate to confine our attention to only a few of them. This is for the reason that quite a large number of labour laws are sex-neutral, as for example, the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, and the Payment



of Bonus Act, 1965. There are a few laws like the Factories Act, 1948, Mines Act, 1952, and the Plantations Labour Act, 1951, where there are special provisions relating to hours of work, restrictions on employment and the like in respect of women workers. Lastly, there are two laws which have been enacted specially with the women workers in view, and these are the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, and the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.

12. An important feature of the various labour laws, relating to social security, welfare, safety and working conditions, employment or dispute resolution, is the existence of employer-employee relations and the consequent need to define an employer and an employee. This is for the reason that for the purpose of employment or provisions of benefits, the law places the responsibility on the employer who for that purpose will have to be identified precisely. But in respect of the large mass of women workers in the unorganised sector, either the employer keeps on changing frequently, as in agriculture or construction work, where assured employment for a minimum number of days in the year is itself in doubt, or there is no direct relationship with the ultimate employer as in the case of occupations where the only point of contract for the workmen is only a lower level intermediary— be it in beedi rolling or agarbatti making in the homes, or construction work. In addition, we have the large mass of “self-employed women” who are supposed to be their own employer; the ramifications of this kind of work are several. In respect of all such categories, where the normal pattern of labour laws may not be applicable, it will be necessary to evolve patterns and systems by which, through some kind of self regulating mechanism in which such working women have a role not merely as beneficiaries but as participants in the enforcement of provisions applicable to them, the desired results are enabled to be achieved.

13. Coming back to the labour laws, there are a few general observations to be made and these observations along with the resulting recommendations are of general applicability to the labour laws. The basic criticism, validity levelled against the labour legislation in the country, is that while there may be scope or need for improving the contents of the law, these laws are ineffective in so far as there is inadequate or more of ten no enforcement of these laws. The enforcement machinery is inadequate. The provisions of the law are not clear and precise, making it a battleground for legal interpretation in the hierarchy of tribunals and courts. Penalties are inadequate and participation of the workers in the enforcement of the law is totally absent. The adjudicating machinery and the magistracy are quite often indifferent if not hostile to the aspirations of the working people, and even these authorities are too far removed from the workers and their homes for them to seek recourse to these authorities without considerable loss of time and consequently of wages, even if they summon up enough courage at the risk of losing their employment, to make complaints against the employer concerned. In the case of women workers in the unorganised sector, these difficulties are even more acute. Keeping these in mind, the following *general recommendations* are made, *inter alia*, for amending the relevant acts suitably to give effect to these recommendations:

(a) A separate wing in the Labour Department may be created which will have exclusive responsibility for dealing with problems of unorganised labour. The strength and prestige of this wing will have to be commensurate with the responsibilities towards this sector of labour which accounts for 90% of the total work force; in this wing, an adequate number of women functionaries—not less than 30% at various levels—will have to be appointed, so that the problems of women workers are not ignored. While recognising that it may be necessary for the government to empower officers of other departments also to function as inspectors under the relevant labour laws, it is to be ensured that the nodal department and other departments will only have an auxiliary role. This is considered desirable and necessary for two reasons. Firstly, the labour department functionaries have, compared to functionaries of other

departments of Governments, greater sympathy for and understanding of the problems of labour. Secondly, other departments do not consider these duties and responsibilities as relevant to them with the result that they view these as avoidable burdens. Within the labour department, it is necessary to provide in the service rules that the functionaries must have worked in the unorganised sector wing for a minimum period of time before they can be considered for promotions to posts of higher responsibilities.

(b) In so restructuring the administrative arrangement, it will be necessary to have the functionaries—not merely inspectors but also authorities like the claims authority under Sec. 15 of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 or Sec. 20 of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the authority under section 39 (2) of the Bidi and Cigar Workers (conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, at levels not higher than that of the Block or Panchayat Samithi. Already some State Governments have amended the central laws to provide for appointment of claims authorities under PW Act/- Minimum Wages Act at these levels, for example, Minimum Wages (Maharashtra Amendment) Act, 1975, Wage Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Act, 1976. It is also necessary to provide in the Acts and Rules that where any proceeding, either on a complaint or on claim petition, takes more than two hearings for final disposal of the matter and, where the presence of a worker is needed from the third hearing onwards, the employer must pay to the concerned worker the day's minimum wages for each such extended hearing along with cost of travel to the place of hearing from the place of residence and back, such payment being made in the presence of the authority at the end of the days hearing, even if the hearing is only for further adjourning the hearing; an exception to this provision can be made as when it is incontrovertibly established that the hearings had to be extended solely for the default of the worker.

(c) Powers of inspection, and consequently of filing complaints, must be given to women's organisations, trade union functionaries/workers representatives and other women government functionaries at the village level such as ANMs' school teachers, health visitors and the like. Power to file complaints for non-compliance with the laws can also be given to individual workers in respect of defaults pertaining to them.

(d) The penalties prescribed under several labour laws for violation of the provisions provide for fine or imprisonment. In actual practice, even in those cases where the offence is established and a finding of guilt recorded, the magistrates are inclined to construe these as technical offences resulting in the offending employers being let off with a trivial fine which has no relationship to the hardships caused to the workers or the financial benefits that have accrued to the employer consequent on the violation of the law. It is necessary to amend the laws to provide for a minimum fine of Rs. 500/- or a multiple, say five—of the benefits that have been denied to an individual worker, whichever is higher. Any further default should be treated as a continuing offence and must be visited with an additional fine of Rs. 100/- for each day of default. From out of these fine that are realised, the deprived worker will have to be paid all her legal dues and a solatium of an equal amount, along with her expenses. Where complaints relate to a group of working women, the above amounts will have to be correspondingly increased

(e) Likewise, the laws should be amended to provide that, in a case where a working woman has been discharged from work for the reason that she has preferred a complaint against her employer for non-payment of minimum wages or for violation of any provision of the relevant laws, the punishment must be compulsory imprisonment; this must be the case even where a complaint is made on her behalf by another person or by a Trade Union of which she has become a member. The affected worker must be entitled to automatic reinstatement in her job without any break and with full back wages. Similarly, where the offence relates to sex

discrimination, for example, non-payment of equal remuneration, the present level of punishment which is only a fine may be enhanced to include imprisonment. We think that the Equal Remuneration Act has been in the statute book for a long enough period to warrant stiffer penalties.

(f) Section 22 of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, makes every offence under that Act cognizable (and bailable), Sec. 14 AB of Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 makes default in payment of contribution a cognizable offence. It is desirable to make a periodical review of the provisions of the various labour laws to see whether any of the violations must be made a cognizable offence. Offences of a serious nature such as removal from service for complaining against the employer regarding violation of labour laws, non-payment of equal remuneration to women workers, short measures in supply of raw material and in recording receipt of furnished product, could be made cognizable. We are not including any specific recommendation on this except to suggest a periodic review on the lines indicated herein.

(g) Labour laws provide for trial of offences by magistrates of the first class or a metropolitan magistrate. It would be adequate to have these offences, which deal essentially with matters which are simple and relate to question of fact, tried by second class magistrate who is empowered to award imprisonment upto a maximum of one year and a fine of upto a thousand rupees. Keeping in view what has been related in sub-para (iv) the law may stipulate that notwithstanding these limits, the magistrate will be empowered to levy a fine which is a multiple of the amount in default.

(h) Another suggestion that we would recommend is that labour courts and claims authorities under the Payment of Wages/Minimum Wages Act, could also be vested with magisterial powers to try offences under the various labour laws. Such a step, apart from reducing the work load on magistrates that a more effective enforcement of labour laws will entail, would also have the advantage of their offences being tried by persons whose understanding of labour laws and policies is vastly superior to that of the ordinary magistracy.

(i) There are provisions in various labour laws which prescribe time limits within which claim petitions or complaints will have to be made; for example, Proviso to Sec. 20 (2) of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Proviso to Sec. 15 (2) of Payment of Wages Act, 1939, Sec. 27 of the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, etc. It is necessary to examine such provisions to ensure that while old and stale claims and complaints are not allowed to be agitated, the time limits fixed are adequate and reasonable keeping in view the unorganised nature of the workforce and the special disabilities of women workers.

(j) Experience has shown that all the labour laws are more honoured in their breach than in their observance. It is, therefore, essential that the burden of proof of establishing that the provisions of the Acts and Rules have been complied with must be wholly on the employer. It should not be the responsibility of either the worker concerned or the complainant to show that the law has been violated. Where a complaint is filed, it is upto the employer to satisfy the court that he has complied with the legal provisions. This is a very important issue and we very strongly recommend that all labour laws squarely place the onus wholly on the employer.

(k) The Uttar Pradesh Criminal Law (Composition of Offences and Abatement of Trials Amendment) Act, 1976 incorporates a new Section 22 CC in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, providing for compounding of offences under the Act subject to certain limitations and conditions. This again is a device that can be examined with reference to various labour laws to see to what extent it may be desirable to provide for such compounding. This must be permitted only at a responsible level and no compounding can be permitted where the dues of the working women are not fully paid with some solatium. Provisions of Sec. 25 of the

Minimum Wages Act, 1948, against contracting out gives us the lead in the matter of examining the extent to which compounding can be allowed.

(l) Section 66 of the Factories Act, 1948, Sec. 25 of the Plantations Labour Act, 1951, Sec. 46 of the Mines Act, 1952, and Sec. 25 of the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, place restrictions on employment of women during night hours. Apart from the restriction on employment of women in underground work in a mine under Sec. 46 (1) (a) of the Mines Act, 1952 which need not be changed, we considered whether it is desirable to retain the existing restrictions on employment of women during night. We took note of the argument that a contributory factor to the decreasing levels of employment of women in certain organised industries like textile and mining (in above ground work) has been the inability of the employer to engage women in the night shift and the alleged objection therefore from male employees to women being recruited who can only work in convenient shifts; another contributory factor is stated to be the additional burden on the employer by way of maternity benefits. While we are not examining whether these are the reasons for decreasing employment of women, we would like to examine the question of night work for women in general terms. Except for continuous process industries, is it necessary to run our industries in three shifts when we find that the capacity utilisation in our economy is quite low. Working the total available capacity, it should be possible to maintain and improve over the current production levels without having to work a third shift. As a matter of general policy, we are inclined to the night shifts, which is detrimental to the health of both male and female workers, should be done away with. It should also be borne in mind that unlike a male worker, a woman worker who works in the night shift is not able to get the necessary rest during the day time in view of the domestic responsibilities which she has to discharge. Where however it becomes absolutely necessary to run a third shift, then there is no reason to restrict employment in those shifts only to men. But special safeguards and benefits may have to be provided, at least for a long period of time to come, to women workers, such as transport to and from places of work, rest room facilities at the end of the shift for the women to rest before leaving for home. We understand that some employers, particularly those in export processing zones, have been seeking exemptions from the provisions of the Factories Act, 1948, relating to restrictions on employment of women during night hours. Such requests do not emanate from any noble feeling that women's employment must be stepped up but stem from the fact that women workers have been found by these employers to be docile enough to be exploited by paying them very low wages. Be that as it may, there is, at worst an arguable case for permitting women workers to work during night hours, but this, as earlier pointed out, must be an exception (with safeguards) to the general rule which is that night shift work must be done away with, except in continuous process industries.

(m) For ensuring that the benefits intended for the workers, more particularly women workers, under the various labour laws actually accrue to them, it becomes necessary for the women workers to seek redress through the established authorities like claims authorities. To help them in this effort, it will be essential that adequate assistance by way of Legal Aid is made available. The recently enacted Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and the agencies established under the Act will have to be pressed into service for the benefit of the women workers. The proposed Equal Opportunities Commission may be entrusted with the task of issuing periodically guidelines to the legal Aid agencies and others interested in this area of work, on the several aspects of the problems of the working women.

14. We have in the preceding subparagraphs made a series of recommendations—both procedural and substantive and we would suggest that an omnibus legislation is undertaken to amend all the relevant laws on the above lines, instead of bringing in piece-meal amendments

to each of the laws. These recommendations do not relate exclusively to women workers but it is our belief that legislative changes on the lines indicated above will ultimately benefit women workers more, as they are the more disadvantaged sector, even in this unorganised mass of our work force.

We now propose to examine individual labour laws and to make our recommendations.

(a) The Minimum Wages Act, 1948:

15. This is, by far, the most relevant and important piece of legislation for the unorganised sector, as the whole scheme of the Act is designed to give a modicum of protection to workers in unorganised sector industries. Without going into details about the ineffective nature of the implementation of Act, with particular reference to women workers, following recommendations are made in respect of this Act.

(i) The Act, at it stands now, merely provides, *inter alia*, a mechanism for fixing and revising minimum rates of wages but does not give any guidelines as to the basis on which the minimum wages are to be fixed or revised. This has been the subject matter of considerable criticism and discussion over the years. We do not want to elaborate on this. In fixing and revising minimum rates of wages, the basic minimum needs of the worker and his/her family for sustenance should be kept in view so as to enable him/her at least to cross the poverty line. It is necessary to point out that at the current levels of minimum rates of wages notified under the Act for all scheduled employments, both by the Central and State Governments, the total annual family income will be below the poverty line. The poverty line in rural areas is at Rs. 6400 as the annual household income at 1985 prices.

(ii) Payment of minimum wages, particularly in respect of agriculture, can be partly in cash and partly in kind in the shape of foodgrains, with the specific option of the worker concerned to receive part of the wages in kind. When payment is in kind, utmost care must be taken to ensure correct quantities and the right quality. The prices at which the foodgrains are valued must be the wholesale prices at the nearest mandi or the subsidised prices at which these are supplied in programmes like 'Food for Work'. A variant of this could be payment of wages wholly in cash with arrangements made at the village level for sale of foodgrains and other essential commodities at subsidised prices.

(iii) In notifying wages under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, we see in some notifications that the work is classified as "light work usually done by women" and "heavy work usually done by men"; this is, to say the least, most objectionable and is only a device to circumvent the law and at the same time perpetuate the earlier practice where women workers' wages were fixed at lower levels than those for men workers. This must stop and specific occupations must be listed out and minimum rates of wages notified against these, so that it is possible to verify whether women-related occupations are ranked lower in the matter of wages.

(iv) In quite a large number of scheduled employments and occupations thereunder, the practice is to fix minimum rates of wages on the basis of piece-rates. In determining the output, no scientific or equitable procedure is followed, resulting in women workers particularly in home-based occupations, having to put in very long hours of work, supplemented by the efforts of other members of the family, to earn a pittance of a wage which may be a fraction of the time-rated wage; also, for reasons beyond their control or comprehension, sufficient raw materials are not issued to them to enable them to earn more piece-rated wages. Without going into the problems caused by short weighments, arbitrary rejections etc. for which we recommend provisions as in Sec. 39 (2) of the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act 1966, we would recommend the following. Firstly, the fixation of piece rates

must be down with reference to what an ordinary adult women can be able to produce or achieve in a period of eight hours of work and that output must entitle her to earn what would be the minimum time-rate wages per day in that employment and in any other comparable scheduled employment. In working out the output, it is necessary to ensure that the women worker(s) put on the protective equipment, if any, that may be prescribed but with in actual practice are not worn either because they are not supplied or they are considered to be a hindrance to quick work and more production. The time spent by the home workers in collecting the raw materials and in returning the finished product should also be kept in view in fixing piece-rates. If, for example, the time-rate minimum wages per adult per day in say, road making is Rs. 15 per day, then the piece-rate must be so worked that the reasonable output must enable her to earn Rs. 15 per day. The existing practice under which millions of women and child workers working in their homes on various activities earn much less than Rs.5/day, that too with assistance from other members of the family, must stop.

16. Secondly, where wages are fixed and paid on piece-rates, there must invariably be a fall-back wage which may be, say, 75% of the time-rated wages and this wage must be paid to the women worker even if the output is low for the reason that raw materials were not supplied or for any other reason beyond the control of the worker. Such a provision would, in addition to ensuring a modicum of earning to the women workers, also put the employer on guard to ensure that adequate work is provided.

17. A related concept would be the payment of retaining allowance to workers during off-season or periods of inactivity in an intermittent type of employment, such as brick kilns, pappad-making, food processing and canning, where work is not possible throughout the year for various reasons. Provision for a retaining allowance will also help in reinforcing the employer-employee relationships.

18. Allied to these is the need for enrolling or registering every one of these workers on the register of the employers. The present practice, particularly where the minimum rates of wage are piece-rated to enter the name of the head of the household, which is usually a man even though he does no part of the work which is exclusively or substantially done by the women must also stop.

(v) Fall-back wage and/or retaining allowance as a concept may not be easy to implement in agriculture by individual farmers who may have no work to provide. There may be some similar difficulties in some other scheduled employments also. We recommend that both with a view to ensure adequate earnings to the unorganised women workers but also to enhance their bargaining strength, a scheme of employment guarantee should be implemented. The employment guarantee scheme need not and should not confine themselves to stone-breaking, earth work, road making and the like but must be drawn up in consultation with the village people taking into account the available local resources and the local needs. In fields like health, adult literacy, nutrition, rural housing and the like, there exist abundant opportunities to generate employment for women workers; such activities will also enable the women workers to upgrade their skills and to acquire more and more confidence in themselves. Not merely in the formulation of schemes but in their actual implementation, the women workers will have to be actively involved. It is only then that planning will become a democratic process and the basic objective of planning, viz, productive employment for the people at the local levels, realised.

(vi) In respect of home based women workers—by and large, excepting for handloom, most home-based workers are women—it is seen that the employer is saved from incurring not merely expenses relating to setting up a factory, installing equipment but also expenses for supervision and control. Through the mechanism of rejections, at various levels, and the

consequent loss of wages to the women worker for the labour she has already put in, effective, though unfair, control is being exercised at no cost to the employer. It will therefore be not unreasonable to suggest that the home-worker is recompensed to an extent for this element of self-supervision, as well as provision of work space and sometimes a part of the material inputs. We recommend therefore that a premium of 25% of the notified minimum rate of wages either time-rate or piece-rate, is paid to the home-workers to compensate for this. This additional amount will count as wages for all purposes, including leave wages, bonus gratuity, workmen's compensation and social security.

(vii) Ensuring prompt and complete payment of minimum rate of wages is of paramount importance in raising the levels of living of these workers and as Minimum Wages Act, 1948, itself acts or should act as a rallying point for the organisation of their workers, it is very essential that protests by workers in support of demands for payment of notified wages should not be seen as problems relating to maintenance of law and order or public peace or national security and the like.

(viii) We are distressed to learn that quite a few State Governments have, of late, been liberal in the use of the powers of exemptions granted to them under Section 26 of the Minimum Wages Act. This power has been used, or rather misused in our view, to grant exemption from the provision of the Act in respect of drought relief work where the wages are kept at about 80% or so of the notified minimum rates of wages. Notwithstanding the decision of the Supreme Court of India in the Rajasthan Case where the Rajasthan Famine Relief Works Employees (Exemption from Labour Laws) Act, 1964, was struck down, recourse is being had to Sec. 26 of the Minimum Wages Act. The principle is still the same, as this amounts to forced labour, the workers in drought-affected areas being compelled by economic necessity to offer themselves for work at less than the notified minimum wages. We cannot sufficiently strongly condemn this and strongly recommend that provisions in the Act for grant of exemption from payment of minimum rates of wages be deleted.

(xi) At present, minimum rates of wages are fixed/revised in respect of jobs which are included in the schedule. Section 27 of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, empowers the appropriate government to add employment to the schedule by notification after prior publication. Notwithstanding the fact that each government has been periodically adding employments to the schedule, there may still remain certain employments which are not added to the schedule. Even where the employment is added to the schedule, there may be time lags in the fixation of minimum rates of wages for that employment and under the scheme of the Act, other benefits of the Act also will not accrue to the workers by mere scheduling but only after minimum rates of wages have been fixed. So to ensure that wages at an irreducible minimum level is payable to anyone who works, it is suggested that a national or at least a regional minimum wages is fixed and this rate, which will have to be periodically revised, made widely known through the media.

(x) In setting up advisory boards and committees for fixing/revision of minimum rates of wages, there must be at least one woman member to represent the interests of women workers on wage fixation/revision committees and not less than two women workers on the advisory boards to represent the interests of women workers.

(b) The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act., 1970

19. Apart from the well-recognised and well-accepted findings that this Act, like several other labour laws, suffers in implementation, a disturbing feature affecting particularly women workers is their increasing numbers in the manufacturing sector on a contract basis. A report on contract labour in the textile industry in Ahmedabad states that this phenomenon is of



recent origin; what started in a small way in the bobbin cleaning department spread to other departments of the industry where normally permanent workers are employed. Sixty per cent of these workers are women, getting Rs. 7-8 or less of wages per day. We see that in a quite a few major establishments work which was previously done 'departmentally' is now being get done by contractors. Thus what happens is the reverse of what Section 10 of the Act intended. This situation stems, in our view, from the inability of the workers and their organisations to raise an industrial dispute on the demand for abolition of contract labour system, as they used to before the commencement of the Act. The decision of the Supreme Court in *Vegoils Private Ltd. vs. Workmen* (1971) 2 SCC 724 has resulted in a situation where abolition of Contract Labour can be effected only within the framework of the Act, as contained in Section 10. By this decision, the Supreme Court has held that with the passing of the Contract Labour Act, 1970, the jurisdiction of industrial tribunals to adjudicate upon the disputes relating to abolition of contract labour or its absorption by the employer has been taken away and the jurisdiction to decide about the abolition of contract labour has to be done in accordance with Section 10 of the Contract Labour Act. Here, we find that the workers are at the tender mercies of the appropriate government who may be or are tardy in even constituting the Advisory Boards, let alone consulting them and taking a decision, as envisaged in Sec 10. No wonder, this has encouraged employers not merely to persist with contract labour instead of employing regular workmen but also to replace regular workmen with contract labour. Either the judgement of the Supreme Court will have to be revised or the matter legislatively corrected, so that the workers could at least raise an industrial dispute and await the decision of the industrial tribunal.

20. It may also be provided in the law that when the system of contract labour is abolished the principal employer must take all the affected contract labour in his direct employment, otherwise, the purpose of abolishing contract becomes meaningless as far as the effected contract labour is concerned.

21. It may also be useful to draft the definition of the term "employee" as has been done in the M.P. Industrial Relations Act, 1960, and Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946, to include a person employed by a contractor to do any work for him in the execution of a contract with employer within the meaning of sub clause (e) of clause 14; the above sub-clause reads as follows:- "Employer includes..... (e) where the owner of any undertaking in the course of or for the purpose of conducting the undertaking contracts with any person for the execution by or under the contractor of the whole or any part of any work which is ordinarily part of the undertaking, the owner of the undertaking".

22. In this connection, it is relevant to quote at some length a passage from the Report of the (Gujarat) Labour Laws Review Committee (1974) headed by justice D.A. Desai (currently chairman of the Law Commission). In the chapter on Factories Act, 1948, the report in paragraph 14.9 states:

23. "The question whether a person is a workman or an independent contractor or whether a contract is a contract of service or contract for services has always been troubling the Courts, employers and workmen. The Supreme Court observed in *Chintaman Rao vs. State of Madhya Pradesh* (AIR 1958 SC 388) that word "employed" in the definition of 'workman' implied three things, (i) employer, (ii) employee and (iii) control over the employee by the employer. The concept of control varies from industry to industry and individual to individual. The question was debated at length in *Shanker Balaji Waje vs. State of Maharashtra*, 1962, 1 LLJ, 110, wherein condition of control was further examined. It is time that concept of our worker should also be introduced in the Factories Act, 1948, in order to eliminate the unhealthy tendency of converting one's own workman into a contractor by mere legal format. This can be achieved by



the integration theory put forward by Somerwell L.J. and Denning L.J. in *Cassidy vs. Ministry of Health* (1951) ALL E & R 574 which provides that the test of being a servant does not rest now-a-days on submission to orders. It depends on whether the person in part and parcel of the organisation. To amplify what we mean here we would request reference to the concept of home worker as included in the definition of employee in Section 2(f) of the Bidi and Cigar Workers (conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 as well as that of an outworker in the definition of "employee" in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948.

We will have more to say on this when we discuss the problems of home-based workers.

(c) The Inter State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979

24. This Act is almost a non-starter. When the administration is indifferent in implementing labour laws pertaining to labour from within the state, it is not surprising that the problems of the inter-state migrant worker do not receive any attention at all, excepting in those odd cases that hit the headlines in the media or which come up before the courts. Even so, it would be desirable to provide either in the Act or in the Rules that the contractor must set up or cause to be set up grocery shops at the workspot so that the workers, more particularly the women workers, do not have to go long distances for buying their daily requirements. The prices of the goods sold must be subsidised and the local administration must be required to inspect these shops to ensure that there is no exploitation of the workers.

25. A suggestion has been made that all workers working in another state, irrespective of whether they are recruited by a contractor as required by the Act or not should be brought under the purview of this Act. This will, if accepted, go counter to the entire scheme of the Act which seeks to regulate employment by the principal employer of persons from another state through a contractor who recruits these persons for ultimate employment by the principal employer.

(d) Maternity Benefit Act, 1961

26. We note that a Bill has been introduced in Parliament recently for amendments to the Act. We endorse the proposals in the Bill.

27. One of the points often urged as the reason for the decrease in employment of women is the incidence of Maternity benefits and the consequent reluctance of the employer to hire women workers. It is not as though the average expenditure incurred as maternity benefits is very large; one report indicates that in 1977-78 the average expenditure per woman worker in factories ranged from Rs. 1.31 to Rs. 4.54 per year—an absurdly low sum—but even so, one can visualise a psychological, if not a financial barrier in the minds of the employer in recruiting women as employees.

28. Whatever may be the causes and motivations, it is necessary that the 'burden' of maternity benefits in respect of women employees must be borne by all the employers and not only by the individual employer who has women in his or her employment. It is seen that in respect of establishments covered under the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, the expenditure incurred in providing the benefits under the MBT Act is borne by the corporation and not by the individual employer concerned. It is therefore necessary to provide a method by which this responsibility for providing maternity benefits is equally shared by all the employers. For this purpose we recommend, on the lines already proposed by the National Commission on Labour, the establishment of a Central Fund out of which the benefits may be provided. All employers should pay to this fund a percentage of the total wages (of both men and women workers) as monthly contribution. The fund may be controlled and administered by the ESI

Corporation or by the appropriate welfare funds. Consistent with this approach, we think it is not necessary to prescribe any qualifying period of service to enable a woman worker to obtain maternity benefits.

29. While this will no doubt help in making the intended benefits available to the women workers, this will still not cover a very large body of unorganised women workers, unless the coverage under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, is made universal along with strengthening and widening the administrative structure of E.S.I. Corporation adequately. Even so, Maternity benefits will not accrue to the large mass of unorganised "self-employed" women workers, as also to those agriculture and construction. In dealing with this question in respect of this large number of women workers, the usual employer-employee approach is of no avail and we must look to other kinds of solutions. In this context it is relevant to refer to schemes of maternity benefits to women agricultural workers which are of being implemented by States Like A.P., Karnataka and Gujarat, where the entire expenditure, on howsoever modest a scale as far as individual women workers are concerned, is borne by the State Governments. Parenthetically, we may also refer to the Provision Sec. 37 (3) of the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966, according to which maternity benefit is available to home workers also (1974) 4 SCC 43. The basic approach is that the woman is a worker and it is obligatory for the State to provide her with appropriate maternity benefits and child care through creches. Where it is not feasible to identify an employer in whom the responsibility can be assigned and where, because of administrative difficulties relating to maintenance of registers and collection of dues, it is not possible to assign these responsibilities to the whole corpus of employees, the State should step in, in accordance with the Directive Principle of Act, 42.

30. We are elaborating on this matter in some detail, as provision of maternity benefits and childcare are the most crucial elements in dealing with problems of women workers as compared to those of men workers. Both her biological functions and in the Indian context, her domestic functions, are these two elements paramount. No solution to the problems of women at work will be adequate unless it dates into account. The problem of maternity benefits and childcare. Except for a miniscule proportion of adult women who may be not doing any socially productive work, all Indian women, particularly those in rural areas, spend long hours each day in such work, in addition to the inevitable domestic chores, which will include, in quite a large number of cases, fetching water and cotteching firwood. If in some cases, there are no identifiable employers from whom they receive wages for their work, that does not need to spend time and effort to identify who is a worker and who is not. In their capacity as workers, they are entitled to receive from the society and the state adequate maternity benefits and arrangements for childcare. We therefore unhesitatingly recommend that, where it is not possible to extend maternity benefits to the working women through a special fund referred to in the earlier paragraph, the responsibility for providing this benefit will devolve on the State Governments. The existing practice in some states of providing maternity benefit to women agricultural labour already referred to, will only have to be extended to cover all adult women. This will have to be supplemented by appropriate childcare through provision of creche, to be located preferably in the village schools, so that they can leave their children there when they are at work; this will also facilitate the elder children going to school instead of staying at home. We do not think it is necessary or proper to restrict there benefits to only three confinements for each women. The emphasis on a small family norm will, in our view, be better served by improved maternity and childcare which will, by reducing infant mortality and improving the health of the mother and her children, result in small families. The funds that are being spent in large quantities on family planning, can be better spent on providing maternity benefits and improved childcare. Necessary legislation, if this can't be achieved through State

policies and programmes, may be enacted for the purpose.

31. Keeping with our view that maternity benefits and childcare be regarded as a package, the name of the Act may be changed to Maternity Assistance Act.

(e) Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

32. Despite the Act having been on the statute book for more than a decade, it is seen that the practice of paying lower rates of wages for women for the same or similar work still persists; even settlements are entered into incorporating such discriminatory provisions, despite these being illegal. It is also found that the provisions of this Act are still not widely known; in some cases, employers have been known to confuse this law with the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. A massive educational programmes must be undertaken. Radio and Television programmes must include short announcements each day about the requirements of equality of wages as between men and women workers. It must also be emphasised in such programmes that this law is universally applicable to all sectors including domestic service. Another suggestion that we have received and which we endorse, is that at all governmental functions, particularly in rural areas, there must be brief announcements regarding the prevailing rates of minimum wages in agriculture, construction etc., as also the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, regarding obligation under the law to pay equal wages to men and women workers for work of same or similar nature.

33. The main purpose of the Act is to ensure payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers in an establishment doing same or similar nature of work. There have been suggestions that equal remuneration must be payable for doing work of equal value. While this seems an attractive proposition, conforming to the concept of equal pay for equal work, it is considered by us that measuring value of work and equating them is a far more difficult task than identifying "same work or work of a similar nature". The expression has been defined in Sec. 2(h) of the Act; even so, one notices a tendency to categorize tasks generally done by women as being of a slightly inferior nature, warranting lower rates of wages. One notices this even in the fixation of minimum rates of wages. To avoid this, it will be advantageous if a group of activities in any industrial occupation are broad-banded into one category, on the basis of enquiries and study, so that the present situation is remedied. As pointed out by the Supreme Court, the term does not mean work which is identical in all respects, but work which can broadly be considered to be same or similar in nature to other work. The broad guidelines contained in Sec. 2(h) of the Act should be spelt out in more precise terms in respect of each category of notified establishments and the result made widely known to all employees and workers, through various media. Another purpose of the Act, (and in this respect the Act is a great advance on the ILO Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration), relates to avoidance of discrimination on a ground of sex against women in the matter of employment. This will include, according to the recent amendment of the Act, not merely initial recruitment but also further stages of one's employment including promotions.

34. To enable adequate number of qualified women to fill up post and also to improve the employment opportunities for women in general, we examined the need and feasibility of reservation of seats for women in training institutions like Industrial Training Institutes, and in programmes like apprenticeship training under the Apprentice Act, 1961, TRYSEM etc. We are glad to note that already steps are being taken to encourage women to join what are considered non-traditional trades for women. We also understand that in these trades, women prefer to enrol themselves in all-women classes rather than in mixed classes. To strengthen these trends, we recommend that in all such non-traditional trades in ITIs (both private and government) preference will have to be given to women candidates with an absolute minimum

reservation of 15% for women candidates. We are informed that one of the difficulties in filling up seats by women candidates is the relatively high level of educational qualifications prescribed for admission. To overcome this, we suggest that at least for the next ten years or more, the prescribed qualifications may be relaxed for women and special steps taken in the ITIs to give additional coaching to the women candidates to make up the initial deficiency. We recommend similar arrangements in respect of various trades under the Apprentices Act, 1961 and also in other programmes for training. A conscious effort in this direction is called for to make up for the neglect of the past.

35. It was brought to our notice that in some South Indian plantations, girls who have finished their primary education in the schools run by the plantation managements are not sent for higher education, not only for the reason that the parents are reluctant to send girls to school situated far away but also because they consider higher education for girls unnecessary as they will in any event end up by taking up employment in the plantation itself. This is a serious matter and we recommend that the State Government must pay special attention to this and take steps for providing necessary arrangements to enable girls in plantations to go in for higher education.

36. Another matter that we would like to draw attention to relates to advertisements that appear not unoften in newspapers of job vacancies which indicate that women need not apply or that this violate Section 5 of the Act. A few prosecutions of such cases including that of publishers of the newspapers and adequate media publicity against this will help in doing away with this phenomenon.

37. While all these steps will result in improving the employment opportunities for women, we also consider it necessary, firstly, to devise measures by which the existing situation of reduction of employment of women in certain traditional industries like textiles and mining is corrected and secondly, also to introduce safeguards against technological changes which invariably seem to affect women's employment more adversely.

38. With regard to the first issues, it is necessary to provide in the law that any reduction in the female work force of any establishment by way of retrenchment should have the prior permission of the prescribed authority. Already, there is a provision in Sec. 25 N of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, for prior approval of retrenchment but that applies only to establishments (restricted to factories, mines and plantations) in which not less than 100 workers are employed. We recommend that our suggestion regarding prior permission of a prescribed authority for retrenchment of women workers must apply to all establishments irrespective of its nature and size in terms of employment. Also the principle of last come-first go contained in Sec. 25 G of the I.D. Act may be made inapplicable to women employees.

39. As regards the second issue which is a very serious one we think that the introduction of improved technology will have to be viewed in terms of its effect on women's employment, women's health and drudgery of women's work. While all technological improvements and changes that reduce drudgery of women's work and improve her health status are to be welcomed, any change of technology which affects employment opportunities for women adversely will have to be scrutinised most critically; in this, the main emphasis will have to be on conserving and improving employment opportunities for women. A more effective and purposive use of Sec. 9 A (notice of change) of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, will have to be made and the relevant schedule made explicit to include all such changes as would reduce employment, more particularly those of women workers.

40. The choice of technology cannot be made purely in terms of productive efficiency but will have to be an optimum mix of efficiency and employment. For this purpose, it becomes necessary to associate in the total planning process and decision-making the women workers

and their representative. The Advisory Committees envisaged under Sec. 6 of the Act do not appear to have served the purpose; in quite a few states, these committees have not met and in yet a few others, they have not even been constituted. The Technology policy, its implications for employment conservation and generation, especially for women, will have to be reformulated with the considerations indicated above being held paramount. This issue has also been dealt with in the chapter relating to Impact of Macro Policies. We have separately recommended the setting of an Equal Opportunities Commission and we suggest that these aspects must be the special concern of the Commission, which must be clothed with adequate powers and supported by adequate and competent staff to discharge its responsibilities. When such a commission is set up, the advisory boards under Sec. 6 may not be necessary; likewise Sec. 7 also will deal with complaints and claims. The Commission will also lay down guidelines for observance by Governments, employers, workers and various other organisations.

41. Section 16 of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, empowers the appropriate government to make declarations that the differences in regard to recommendation is based on a factor other than sex. We are not aware of any declarations excepting one in the case of air-hostesses of Air India that have so far been made under this provision of the Act, either by the Central Government or by any of the State Governments. We are also not sure why a declaration is necessary under this Act if the differences in remuneration is based on a factor other than sex. We do not think that the deletion of this section will cause any undue hardship to any employer or any establishment and hence suggest the deletion of this section; even if it is found necessary to retain such a provision, the power of declaration must be with the Equal Opportunities Commission.

(f) Plantations Labour Act, 1951

42. This Act is of special relevance to women workers as they account for 50% of the workforce in plantations.

43. The definition of the term "family" in Sec. (ee) of the Act includes, *inter alia*, "where the worker is a male, his parents dependent on him". There is no reason why female workers' parents should not be treated as part of her family. The Act may be suitably amended. We also recommend that the definition of the terms 'family and dependents' in other enactments be examined to ensure that these kinds of anomalies are removed.

44. Section 10(2) of the Act, dealing with medical facilities, states that if the prescribed facilities are not provided and maintained in any plantation, the chief inspector of plantations can cause these facilities to be provided and maintained and recover the cost thereof from the defaulting employer. A Kerala Statement Amendment to the law provides under S 18 A of the Act that the Chief Inspector can, in case of default in respect of Sec. 8 (drinking water), Sect. 9 (conservance), Sec. 12 (creches), Sec. 15 (housing), and Rules made under Sec. 11 (canteens), Sec. 14 (educational facilities) and Sec. 17 (other facilities like umbrellas, blankets, raincoats etc.), cause these to be provided or maintained and recover the cost from the employer. Similar provisions may be made in the main Act so as to make this uniformly applicable to all States. We also recommend that in other labour legislation which prescribe certain welfare facilities to be provided, the Inspector be empowered in case of default, to cause these to be, provided and maintained and recover the cost from the defaulting employer.

45. The same principle can also be extended to protective equipment that may be prescribed but are not provided. While on the subject of protection and safety, we would like to refer to the work done by the Task Force on Health in which they found that bulk of the occupational health problems of women workers are mainly "postural" in origin. This means that the work

methods and the working arrangements call for change. These changes, in the light of further study, can be incorporated in the laws and regulations, and the law can also prescribe that where those provisions in respect of occupational health are not provided, then the Chief Inspector or Inspector can provide these and recover the cost from the defaulting employer.

(g) Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923

46. Section 2(1) (n) of the Act which defines the term 'workmen' excludes from its ambit a person whose employment is of a casual nature. Given the nature of women's employment in the unorganised sector, it is not difficult for the employer to argue that their employment is of a casual nature. We therefore recommend that the words "whose employment is of a casual nature" be deleted from the definition of workmen in Sec. 2(1) (n).

47. Schedule II to the Act lists out persons who, subject to Sec. 2(1) (n) are included in the definition of the term workmen. In this list there are entries, as for examples, (xviii) (iii) and (xxvi), in which the applicability depends on the number of persons employed; entry (xvii) in fact is not even dependent on the minimum number of workmen employed but on the number of persons a ferry boat is capable of carrying; we are of the view that these restrictions on numbers have no place in social security legislation like the Workmen Compensation Act. These may be removed.

48. The coverage under the Act must be universal. There are large number of workers engaged in areas like agriculture, fisheries and forestry who are not covered by the provisions of the Act. This is so even after 65 years of the existence of the Act. It is necessary to extend the coverage to all workers. Such a provision will be in consonance with the suggestion that we make later on to the effect that the employer must compulsorily take out an Insurance Policy or that compensation must be paid out of a Central Fund.

49. The Act may be amended suitably to place the burden of proof squarely on the employer to establish that the accident did not arise out of and in the course of employment, instead of the workmen having to prove otherwise. Likewise, where the question relates to the nature of injury and extent of disablement, the expert's (medical officer's) certificate must be admitted in evidence, leaving it to the employer, if he so chooses, to summon the medical expert at his cost for purpose of cross examination.

50. We also recommend that the list of occupational diseases enumerated in Schedule III to the Act may be expended to include other diseases like TB and loss of vision. The procedure for adding to the list must be simplified to enable the State Governments and Central Government, under Sec. 3 to add to the employments and occupational diseases in Schedule III, on the basis of quick of survey and enquiries.

51. We also recommend that all employers be compelled by law to take out accident insurance policies or that the payment of Workmen's Compensation be out of a Central Fund to which the all employers pay monthly contribution calculated at a certain percentage of the wages.

52. The law must also be amended so as to compel the employer to retain in service a worker who has suffered partial disablement consequent on an employment injury and given a task suited to her but at emoluments she was drawing at the time of the accident. Where the disability is total, the employer must, in addition to the compensation, give her retrenchment compensation on the scale prescribed in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1942 and also meet the cost of medical care and treatment for a period of, say, five years after her services are terminated.

53. An interesting suggestion made to us proposes that in the case of an accident resulting in the death or disability of a woman worker, the scale of compensation payable must be more

than what is payable under the law for a male worker, for the reason that where a woman dies or suffers disability, the loss is not merely financial but also of the house-keeping functions. Therefore, to provide for this element of "house-keeping", 50 per cent of the normal wages of the woman may be added for purpose of working out the monetary compensation under the Act. We consider that there is merit in this suggestion in so far as it directly reflects the contribution made by the women workers not merely to social production but also to the home. While the exact percentage of wages to be added may be subject matter of discussion, the principle may be accepted and a minimum percentage of 25 adopted, to begin with.

(h) Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act, 1966

54. Apart from the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 which *inter alia*, refers to 'out workers' the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act 1966, is the only labour enactment which deals with home workers in a detailed manner. This enactment is particularly relevant as bulk of the home workers in bidi rolling are women. While the constitutional validity of the law including provision for maternity benefits to the women home-workers is no more in doubt, implementation of the law continues to be unsatisfactory. It must, however, be admitted that the very existence of the law has encouraged formation of trade unions among workers in the bidi rolling industry and this has also led to demand for similar laws for home-workers in other occupations and industries.

55. The main deficiency in the implementation of the law, and from which stem the other defaults in implementation, is the reluctance and failure on the part of the 'employer' to register these women workers in his books and to issue the identity card and log book. As a result, women bidi-workers do not get the benefit that should accrue to them under the law; even wages do not get paid to them but to the male member of the household whose name alone, in most cases, figures in employers' books. In the context of our recommendations regarding fall-back wages, maternity benefits and the like, non-inclusion of the women worker's names automatically disentitles her to these benefits. The basic proof necessary to establish that she is an employee is allowed to be done away with.

56. An interesting feature of the law is contained in Sec. 39 of the Act which in Sub-Section 2, provides for an authority to settle disputes between an employer and employee relating to issue of raw materials, rejection of bidi and payment of wages for rejected bidies. This provision takes note of the sort of disputes that may arise at the local level and seeks to provide a summary remedy for their settlement. It is necessary that the authority to whom such disputes can be referred by the worker must be not farther away than the Block or Panchayat Samiti Headquarters, the appellate authority, referred to in sub-section 3 of Sec. 39, should also not be farther than the sub-divisional headquarters. These are useful provisions, particularly to benefit the woman home-worker but as pointed out in the earlier paragraph, the woman worker can avail of this only if her name is on the employer's book and she has a log book.

57. Besides the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions and Services) Act, 1966 there are two allied legislations viz. the Bidi Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1976. These two legislations provide for levy of cess on manufactured bidi and for provision of welfare facilities with the help of the Fund so created. Section 4 of the Bidi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976, states, *inter alia* that the Fund shall be applied to promote the welfare of persons engaged in bidi establishment. While no doubt the Fund, in actual working, is utilised for providing educational, recreational and other facilities not merely to the 'persons engaged' but also to the members of their families, it could be objected to, though no such objection has so far been raised, on the ground that fund can be applied only to the persons engaged. There does not appear to be any



close relationship between the working of the fund and the implementation of the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act, 1966. We consider that this is necessary, so that both the laws are better administered resulting in all the workers, particularly the women workers, being brought on to the books of the employers and log books issued to them under the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act 1966. Release of funds to the various State Governments from out of the Welfare Fund could be on the basis of the total number of workers registered in each state under the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act 1966.

58. To ensure that all eligible employers are issued identity cards, which are essential to establish an employer-employee relationship, it is suggested that Rule 41 of the Bidi Welfare Fund Rules 1978 be amended to enable the State Government or any other accredited organisation also to issue identity cards.

(i) Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986

59. This recent enactment, which revealed the Employment of Children Act, 1983, seeks to prohibit employment of children in certain tasks and to regulate their conditions of work in certain other employments. A 'Child' is defined as one who is below fourteen years of age.

60. We have had occasion to examine the question as to whether child labour should be totally prohibited by law in our country. In examining the problems of home-based piece-rated women workers, we found that the extent of exploitation of the women workers is so wide-spread that even to earn a fraction of the prescribed minimum rate of wages, she will not only have to work extremely long hours each day but also make her children join her in her task. This, particularly where the child is a girl, results in the child being prevented from going to school, leading to the inevitable cycle of no education, low skills and low earning capacity, thus perpetuating homework with its exploitatively low wages. While the argument in support of child labour is that it enables the child to supplement the meagre household income, it only results in the piece-rated wages being fixed very low in the full knowledge that the home based worker, who is more often than not a woman, will be 'assisted' by other members of her family, particularly the children. This vicious trap will have to be broken in two-ways—one, by so fixing the piece-rate, as indicated by us under the Section on the Minimum Wages Act, that it enables a woman worker to earn a just wage for an eight hour work-day and the other, by prohibiting child labour totally and at the same time enforcing the constitutional mandate of compulsory universal elementary education. Our other recommendation regarding provision of child care facilities will also obviate the need for keeping the elder children at home merely to look after their infant sisters and brothers. It is significant to point out that where the daily earnings of the mother is adequate, as a Kerala in agriculture or construction, there is no incidence of child labour. Thus continued availability of employment at reasonable wages for adults is the basic and obvious method of doing away with child labour.

61. We are satisfied that the problem of home women worker will have to be tackled at different levels and in various ways. One of them is through abolition of child labour, enforcement of compulsory universal elementary education and provision of child care facilities. These measures will not only lead to increasing literacy rates, particularly among girls, but will also provide additional employment opportunities for women.

62. We, therefore, recommend that child labour be prohibited in toto in our country by 2000 AD in a phased manner, starting from now, we may work out a time-table so that each of the years from 1988 to 2000 sees the prohibition of child labour in one or more occupations. That should be our perspective. We are not suggesting that a child should not learn at home any of the crafts and trades that her parents, more particularly her mother, is employed in. We most



certainly want the child to be familiar with, and in course of time be even proficient in it, but only as a learner or a student, and not as a wage earner, and definitely not at the cost of her schooling.

(j) Bonded Labours System (Abolition) Act, 1976

63. In rehabilitating bonded labour, the general approach is to have an outlay of a certain sum of money with which the released bonded labour is expected to become self employed. The amount of money available to each family for rehabilitation is so inadequate as to drive him back to his erstwhile employer in concealed bondage. We think that the rehabilitation of these economically and socially handicapped persons must be through wage employment if possible under the erstwhile employer himself for doing the same work he was earlier doing; now, he (employer) must be required to pay the released person the occupational wage or at least the notified minimum wage on a regular basis. Where however, in any specified location, adequate number of released labourers and suitable extents of land are available; the possibility of collectively rehabilitating them on the land must be explored.

Home-based women workers

64. Home-based workers, a vast majority of whom are women, can be broadly classified into two categories. The first, which is the most predominant is piece-rated home-based workers working for some other employer, and the second is own-account small entrepreneurs or small artisans. By and large, bidi workers, agarbatti workers, handloom workers, readymade garment workers and the like will fall in the first category while hawkers, vendors, rag pickers, and artisans will be in the second category. Within the same occupation it may be possible to find both categories, as for example, in papad making or basket making or leafplate making.

65. It could be argued, on the following grounds, that both these categories should be included, viz. that both types of workers exist as home-based, that the conditions of work and life of both are not very different, that own-account workers are increasingly becoming piece-rated home workers and that protection for piece-rated workers might lead them to become independent own-account workers. However, it was felt that the nature of legislative protection that is needed for these two categories of home-based workers is not the same. The piece-rated workers need better rates of wages, better implementation of labour laws; on the other hand, the own-account workers need remedies that generally lie beyond the scope of labour laws, such as better facilities and arrangements for purchase of raw material, for marketing, for credit, for storage, for work, place, for better prices and for protection against harassment from public authorities. In view of the different sets of remedies that these two categories seem to require, we decided to confine our attention in this section to home-based piece-rated women workers, leaving the problems of own-based women workers to be dealt with in next section, where general laws (rather than labour laws) are being considered. However we recognise the need for the legislative framework for home-based piece-rated workers to encourage formation of cooperatives or cooperative like groups which could handle problems of marketing, purchase etc. and make the workers ultimately independent of middle-men or employers.

66. We considered whether the legislative framework for protection of home based piece-rated workers should include or incorporate an approach on home-based work itself—whether this method of protection should be encouraged or discouraged and/or whether any attempt is to be made to restrict or further increase in the number of home-based workers categorywise. However, after discussion, we agreed that it is not necessary nor even desirable for us to take a view on these larger questions. Nonetheless, we felt that the

home-based workers must have a genuine free choice as to whether they would like to, work at home or outside their homes; such choice presupposes the necessary facilities and infrastructures that will enable home-based workers to opt for work outside their homes. 67. In deciding on the nature of legislative protection that must be given to home-based piece-rated women workers, the question naturally arose as to whether it is necessary to think in terms of a comprehensive self-contained law on the subject or whether the same result could be achieved by making suitable amendments to existing labour laws. After earnest consideration, we came to conclusion that the best way of helping the home-based women workers would be to have a new law specific to the needs of home-based workers as would give them greater visibility. The vexatious question of employer-employee relationship tests can be avoided altogether and a new method for fixing responsibility by looking at control over the production process and ultimate product can be introduced.

68. Having decided on a new law, we considered whether the new law could be on the lines of the Bidi and Cigar workers (Conditions of Employment) Act 1966 which after all relates to an industry where over 90 per cent of the workers are home-based and predominantly women. We took note of the gaps in the implementation of the above law, particularly in respect to women workers, most of whom do not even get recognised as workers. In the light of the experience of the working of the law, and at the same time without denying that the law has over the years in certain cases acted as a rallying point for organizations of workers to be formed or attempted to be formed. We came to the conclusion that the law should provide for Tripartite Boards, on the pattern of Dock Labour Board or Mathadi Boards for the following reasons:

(a) A protective Act like the Bidi Act leaves the implementation of the Act to the employers and the enforcement to the governmental machinery. Experience has shown that neither is effective and the victim is the worker for whose benefits the laws are enacted. A Board, on the other hand, takes over the responsibility for both implementation and enforcement.

(b) A protective Act necessitates the establishment of employer-employee relationship which, as experience has shown, can become a tedious legal exercise. The Board remove this difficulty as individual employer-employee relationship is replaced by a group relationship between the Corpus of employers and of the workers under the aegis of the Board. This will also enable implementation of social security schemes without difficulty.

(c) A Tripartite Board will enable security of employment to be provided to the workers which an Act of the protective type cannot.

(d) A Tripartite Board on which the home-based workers, more particularly the women workers, will have a position of responsibility and authority will not only ensure benefits to the women workers but will give them a visibility which they had been lacking so far. Not all the laws, be it the Minimum Wages Act or the Equal Remuneration Act or the Contract Labour Act or even Bidi and Cigar Workers Act, have so far helped the women workers obtain either the intended benefits or their visibility.

69. While the advantages of having a law which would, *inter alia*, provide for a Tripartite Board to implement the provisions of the Act and Schemes are obvious, we were not unaware of the difficulties that are to be surmounted in a Board type of set up, particularly in the earlier stages of its functioning. We were aware of the difficulties that the Gujarat Cloth Market Board which has been in existence for seven years is facing, having been dysfunctional with the employers and workers and workers not registering themselves, resulting in the workers being left without any protection or benefits. We also recognised that the Board, in respect of home-based workers, will have to deal with operators and workers spread over a large area

and in dispersed locations, unlike the case of Dock Labour Board or Mathadi Boards which function within a limited and compact geographical area.

71. Taking note of these difficulties, we considered that the law should be so drafted as to enable the Board to take on functions in a phased manner, wherever this becomes necessary. Broadly, we envisage the law to contain provisions relating to safety, welfare and working conditions of the home based workers, on the lines of the usual protective legislations; the law will also provide for setting up Boards which will be Tripartite consisting of the Government and employers and an equal number of representatives of workers of whom the majority will be women, whose functions will be wide ranging including registration of employers and workers regulation of employment and be responsible for payment of wages, provisions of other benefits including welfare accident compensation and social security for which purpose it will obtain funds either as advance deposit or levy from the employers.

71. A rough calculation shows that about 36 per cent of the wages will have to be collected additionally from the employers to provide for provident fund, medical benefits, maternity benefits, gratuity, bonus and leave. The Board will have the powers to inspect, power to prescribe and call for returns and information, power to prosecute and power to de-register employers and workers should the need arise. The various trades and occupations relating to home-based workers will be listed in the Schedule to which additions can be made by the appropriate Government by notification. The Board will be authorised to draw up schemes for the various categories of trades/occupations, subject to approval by the appropriate Government. The Board will be enabled to set up Tripartite bodies at the local levels in respect of specific trades/occupations for coming out of this the function of the Board. The Board will also be enabled to set up tripartite/appellate bodies to deal with disputes, if any, between the employers and the workers.

72. While the Act will be a Central Act enacted by Parliament, the State Government will be enforcing the provisions of the law. The law may provide for a Central Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of the various State Level Advisory Committee of the State level Boards and the Central Government. The law may also provide for special sanctions like attachment of stocks, suspension of licences, withdrawal of other facilities like quotes and bank loans in respect of recalcitrant employers.

73. While the establishment of Boards, drawing up of schemes, may take some time, the provisions of the Act relating to welfare, working the normal Government machinery until the Board is able to take over the functions. However, the first task that will have to be undertaken is the complete enumeration of all workers and all employers including contractors, trade or occupation wise. All contractors will be registered as employers and where they are working for a 'principal employer' then they shall be considered to be employment of the 'principal employer'. To ensure that workers entering into a 'sale purchase' arrangements are not left out of the reckoning of workers, the law may define workers on the lines of the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act 1966 and include any person entering into a sale purchase agreement with an employer or group of employers as a workers.

74. We would also suggest that the draft Bill, prepared by Government must be widely circulated to all State Government, Voluntary Organizations, trade union organizations, academic institutions and other bodies which are interested in this subject, for comments, so that what is ultimately put on the Statute Book has been preceded by extensive consultation and hopefully, consensus.

#### Construction Workers

75. We are devoting a separate sub-section to this category of workers, not merely because

of their numbers construction workers, of whom over ten per cent are women, must be numbering, according to one estimate (NICMAR), about 1.2 crores/- but because of the peculiar nature of the problems<sup>3</sup>.

76. They work under an employer or more often under a contractor or his sub-contractor for short periods and move from one employer to another as also from one location to another, with no guarantee of continued employment. This absence of continuing employer relationship between a construction worker and his employer, with the system of contracting and sub-contracting, makes it difficult for the work women to get wages regularly, it is not necessary to account the hardship that the woman construction worker faces in terms of employment, wages welfare, maternity benefit, accident compensation, social security and the like except to point out that the problems of the workers can be tackled effectively only if there is regulation of both employers and the workers in the industry and the entire responsibility entrusted to Tripartite Boards instead of leaving them to the tender mercies of the employer or the caprice of the Government functionary. Actually, a Private Members' Bill has been already introduced in the Lok Sabha on the subject. National Campaign Committee under the chairmanship of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, retired judge of the Supreme Court of India is pursuing the matter of getting law enacted. We endorse this and we are satisfied that this will be the only effective way of ensuring benefits to the workers, as the existing legislations have become irrelevant.

77. The problem of women construction workers can be tackled effectively only through a system of Tripartite Bodies at various levels, on which workers, and more particularly women workers, are represented in adequate numbers. Considerable work has already been done by others in formulating proposals and drafting laws for the purpose.

### **Law Affecting Status of Women Workers**

#### *(ii) General Laws Affecting the Unprotected Women Labour*

78. Women have traditionally been the main producers and earners in our country; whether it is in forestry, fishing or agriculture, they are being marginalised due to the continuing sway of Colonial Laws. Even when they try to survive by wage labour or petty vending, the laws, be it municipal, police or cooperative instead of being used to assist the women, are often used to harass them; redressal mechanisms for grievances of an economic and criminal nature, have also meant time, money and distance for the women and within the patriarchal system where maintenance and property rights are difficult to establish, the survival of women is a struggle.

79. The women workers carry on their trade or profession based on traditional skills or those acquired through long years of experience and hard work. However, the general laws as well as the administration fail to recognise them as productive labour force, take away their traditional rights and access to natural resources, deny the benefits due to them, harass them in the course of their work and they are discouraged from voicing their grievances and getting unionised. Hence new laws as well as amendments to protect women labour.

### **Forest Laws**

80. The tribals who traditionally utilised forest resources in a limited fashion since time immemorial have been marginalised and the Department in total control of forests has allowed unlimited cutting of trees and extraction of forest produce to profit the commercial and industrial interests. <sup>4</sup> The tribals who have to knowledge and experience have no say in the way forests are being utilised are reduced to exploited wage labour.

81. The Forest Department and Forest Development Corporation function at state levels and though they were supposedly set up to eliminate middlemen in the collection and sale of

forest produce in practice only the contract system prevails. The implementation of laws, fixation of prices and redressal are all done by the Forest Department. The tribal women who work for more than 12 hours a day to getting the forest produce are unable to get even the equivalent of a minimum wage. They often have to bribe the Forest Department and Contractor for being on Muster-roll or provided with identity card. The whole family works for the whole day and earns a mere Rs. Six. Due to illiteracy and lack of information, the women do not know the official rate. Part of the produce collected may be rejected by contractors; short payments are common with contractors running away in last week. It is next to impossible to claim wages from the Forest Department. Fall from trees resulting in injury or death are not compensated. The women are also sexually harassed by Forest Guards and Contractors.

82. The Indian Forest Act states that villages around forests could collect wood for domestic use, but in practice it is either not allowed or there's too much harassment all along the way. Firewood collections are also harassed by petty officials to whom they have to keep paying bribes. The cane and bamboo workers can't find enough cane or bamboo to carry on their profession. They are harassed while getting their raw material, making the baskets and selling their wares.

83. It is suggested that a comprehensive Minor Forest Produce Workers Act be enacted on the lines of the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966 so that the working conditions are regulated, and social security as well as accident compensation are provided and that piece rate is fixed in consultation with labour representatives. Violation of the Minimum Wages Act should be made a cognisable offence and workers should be protected against victimisation. There should be a time limit for disposal of claim petitions and mobile courts should visit remote areas on fixed days. All this would imply, as it should in all fairness, that these women who collect minor fresh produce are actually the workers under either the contractors and or the Forest Department and not merely sub contractors.

84. The cane and bamboo workers should be treated as a priority sector and provided bamboo or cane at concessional rates. Bamboo should not be given to the paper industry. The workers must be able to get a licence quickly and easily by simply paying a fee.

85. *Reversal of Government's policies* towards tribal and especially GOI report of committee for Review of Rights and concession in Forest Areas, Ministry of Agriculture (1984) which wishes to eliminate tribals from forest occupations becomes very important for protecting the women labour.

86. In fact the Forest Department must involve the tribals, especially the women, in running its affairs and put an end to the harassment of tribals. There should be a Board to facilitate tribals' participation. Land should be allotted to firewood collectors to grow and cut fuel wood trees under the Social Forestry Scheme. Suitable amendments to the Indian Forest Act may be made.

## **Women and Land/Agriculture**

### **Displacements and Land Acquisition Act**

(a) Projects undertaken by the Government in rural and forest areas always result in displacement and dispossession of lands held by peasants and tribals. The Land Acquisition Act is violated very often by the administration itself by taking possession of the land even before the formalities are completed. Notices meant for the owners of the land are not properly served and objections raised are rejected almost as a matter of course where such objections are raised by the poorer sections. The compensation given is inadequate and does not enable the dispossessed persons to rehabilitate themselves.

87. It has become a common practice that lands are taken away before payment of compensation. More seriously, payment of cash compensation is no remedy. What is required is provision of alternate land to the extent possible. The beneficiaries of the projects for which land is acquired must also make appropriate sacrifices from their holdings to provide land for the rehabilitation of the dispossessed. Depriving a person of agricultural land takes away the employment opportunity that the woman has by working on the land; this loss can be compensated only by another piece of land on which she can work. This aspect of the whole question must be uppermost in deciding whether land is to be acquired at all for a public purpose or not. It is to be recognised that provision of employment opportunity on land to a person who is already working on her land of which she is to be dispossessed is of as great public purpose as the one for which land is acquired. In granting alternate land, the title must be jointly in the name of the woman and her spouse, even if the acquired land was not in her name.

88. Planning for a region terms of projects big or small, is normally based on political decisions at the state or central level. At that time the people affected or benefited are not consulted. It must be mandatory that the affected people be consulted, properly informed of consequence and alternatives, and the impact of project reviewed before the final decision is taken. Such projects normally do not lead to increased employment opportunities for local people while their existing sources of livelihood are taken away. Thus it is necessary to review the concept of development which treats technology and production as progressive, while subsistence agriculture on which lakhs of people survive is denigrated and ignored.

89. (b) Pauperisation of Peasantry and Position of Women in Agriculture

(i) *Peasantry*: In the agricultural sector, there is increased pauperisation due to its integration into market economy, concentration of land in a few hands and depletion of water resources.<sup>5,6</sup> The result is that the rural poor are unable to carry on subsistence projects have aggravated the problems faced by the poor peasants and agricultural labour. Unable to survive in the rural areas, the men normally migrate to find odd jobs in nearby towns. The women and children are left in the village and their survival has become very difficult.

The Government is propagating the importance of being self-employed and of the credit facilities available. But since the land is owned by men in the patriarchal system, credit is denied to the women. The woman may own some land in her native village but she cannot work on it or use it as security since after marriage she moves to the husband's village. In her husband's house she may do the hardest part of labour but the ownership is male. Even tenancy laws do not recognise her labour and only the male is considered the tenant.

Credit facilities for poor women should be available either without security or with land in her native village as security.

(ii) *Agricultural Labour*: Provision of employment in all States for providing jobs which are suitable to local skills, conditions and needs is imperative in today's situation. The scheme must be administered by committees with representatives elected by registered poor peasants with proportionate representation of women. All types of work including child care, waste land development afforestation and irrigation works or other types of traditional crafts could be organised under the scheme at the same time ensuring payment of minimum wage, equal remuneration and provision of Employment Card with details of work.

90. Instances of agricultural labour working in bonded state have been reported from all parts of the country except Kerala. The bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act instead of ensuring proper working conditions, takes the worker away from the place of work. Very often the 'liberated' worker may go back to the same 'master' due to inability to continue existence as



Child bearing and rearing are not recognised as a social responsibility and her efforts in this sphere do not carry a price tag.

petty producer with the money given by Government. Redistribution of land with necessary facilities would help the family to survive independently.

91. The many problems faced by women agricultural workers include denial of minimum wages and equal wages, victimisation for lodging complaints and unionising, time involved in dettling claim petition, inaccessibility of redressal machinery, travel cost and loss of earnings.

92. In most States, the minimum wage is fixed differently for men and women, the women's work is considered 'light' hence wages would be lower than man's work which is considered 'heavy'. Thus, it is necessary to scientifically assess agricultural task and fix wages for the same.

93. Violation of minimum wage is to be treated as a cognisable offence. The worker should be protected against victimisation for making complaints. There should also be a time limit for disposal of claim petitions and the mobile court should visit different areas on fixed days of the month.

94. The Kerala Agricultural Workers Act may be extended and implemented for the whole country.

95. Fundamentally, the Land Ceiling Act which if implemented by distributing all the surplus lands to landless families (in joint names) could have led to agricultural prosperity and equality, has been thwarted by

- (i) Benami land holdings through transaction after the bill.
- (ii) Sale of lands to tenants
- (iii) Declaration of agricultural lands as plantations, orchards etc.
- (iv) Formation of trusts, cooperatives.

96. The proper implementation of the law by nullifying all the sales after the introduction of the Bill in the Legislatures, distribution of surplus lands to the rural poor in joint names; and provision of house sites with Pattas in joint names would go a long way.

#### Fishing

97. Traditional fishing in coastal areas has been affected by trawling and tourism. Trawling by big companies for export of prawns for profits has been going on in an indiscriminate fashion on both the West and East Coasts and has resulted in depletion of resources.

98. *The Marine Fishing Regulation Act* is being violated constantly by the mechanised sector and there's no teeth in the law. Violation must be made a cognisable offence, trawling at night should be banned and the catamaran fisherfolk must have the right to inspect and prosecute under the law.

99. The establishment of hotels and development of tourist spots along the coast has served to evict the traditional fisher people from the beaches where they keep their equipment, do the repairs and fish. Their fishing rights being denied. They cannot go to alternative areas for a variety of reasons.

100. The fishing rights of inland fisherfolk have also been affected by a system of contracts that exists in small towns and villages relating to fishing in ponds and tanks.

101. The women do the selling, cleaning and storing of the catch and have no proper facilities for the same.

102. As workers, they need to be protected during pregnancy and childbirth and old age. Schemes to provide women with social security, work places equipments, licence for selling as well as to protect the rights of traditional fisherfolk have to be implemented. It has been suggested that the representatives should be involved in evolving the schemes as well as in implementation.

#### Vendors, Craftswomen in the Cities

103. Municipal and police consider vending and craft carried on in streets as obstructions. This results in daily harassment of the women. Goods are confiscated for which no proper memos are given, the workers are stopped from continuing their profession; the Municipal Corporation issues licences arbitrarily and only 10% may get licences. Litigation involves expense while regular extortions by Police and Municipal officials are not uncommon. The Municipal definition of a hawker is one who is, moving and selling. This is legitimate while stationary vending is not allowed. Bamboo and cane workers face similar harassment when they work in bastis or footpaths—confiscation, litigation and regular extortions are all too common. Raw material prices are also high. Similarly old cloth vendors have no place for sale. They are harassed by police through confiscation, litigation and extortion and also false accusations of theft. Waste paper pickers are harassed in a similar way though they are involved in these recycling of waste and in the process perform a municipal function.

104. It is important to note that when government is not providing employment for all people, the women take the initiative in organising petty vending or craft in cities and provide necessities for the public at very reasonable prices. So the Municipal Authorities and police must take on an attitude of helping the women rather than harassing them.

105. Licencing should be by a simple procedure of paying a fee as in the case of radio licences; there could be three categories for licences (i) Vendors (ii) Harassment (iii) Handicrafts persons. The licence could be in at least two names including the next of kin, so that alternatively when they do the vending, harassment is avoided. Rag pickers must be recognised as labour and protected against merchants and selling price fixed by the municipal authorities.



106. The Municipal authorities must in fact provide schemes for the vendors in terms of creches, social security, work places and reasonable prices for raw materials. Representatives of the women must be involved in framing and implementing the schemes. Town Planning must take into consideration vending leanes on the roads so that traffic need not be obstructed.

107. Another major area relates to pavement dwellers and slum dwellers, in a majority of whose cases their "residence" is also their place of work. The present practice of periodic clearance of these encroachments causes incalculable harm to these vulnerable sections of our peoples, more particularly to the women. In rare cases alternative accommodation is provided. But this is seldom satisfactory, as it does not take into account the need for providing adequate inside the house as workplace as well.

108. Cooperative Laws The Cooperative Law exists at each level except the Multi State Cooperative Societies Act.<sup>9</sup> Most state laws vie with each other for being anti-cooperative. The laws have provided unlimited powers to the Registrar for registration, bye laws, elections, appointment of Staff, and investment of funds and thus interfere in the running of the society and can even supercede the elected committee and appoint members thus control the cooperative and kill the cooperative spirit. The corporation of the cooperative department and harassment methods adopted by the department are indeed well known. So, for the illiterate women workers to cooperate and improve their conditions, it is necessary to ensure:

- (i) Registration as a simple affair within a time frame and existence of another cooperative with a few of the aims being similar or area of operation of proposed society overlapping with another, must not be given as excuses for the refusal and the concept of the so-called minimum share capital to be scrapped.
- (ii) The Registrar cannot over rule the General Body in formulating and deciding on bye laws and amendments.
- (iii) The Registrar cannot remove elected member or supercede the elected committee.
- (iv) Staff Appointment, pay scales and auditor to be approved by the General Body.
- (v) The manner of application of funds to be decided by the General Body.
- (vi) Compulsory reorganisation to be given up while classification not to affect the functioning of the cooperative.
- (vii) Corrupt officials to be severely punished.
- (viii) Cooperatives not following cooperative principles to be severely punished.

109. In effect, the Department must facilitate the formation of cooperatives rather than exploit them. The Registrar could regulate the cooperatives and not manage them.

110. Keeping in view the delays experienced in getting cooperatives registered under the relevant State Cooperative Societies Acts it is worth considering whether a scheme of provisional registration within a month of the application being made can be incorporated in the law; such a provisional registration, apart from assuring to the promoters that their application are not gathering dust, can also provide for certain minimum benefits such as access to raw materials to the members. This intermediate stage can be like a letter of intent under the industrial licencing policy, with the full registration being compared to the grant of industrial licences.

#### Laws on Sexual Harassment of Women by Employers/Officials

111. The women workers are sexually harassed in urban, rural and forest areas. The sexual exploitation is normally by the employers, the officials or anti-social elements. The new rape law has amended the Evidence Act only for custodial rape but it is necessary that in all cases of

rape and assault faced by women from employers and officials, her statement be taken as sufficient proof while the onus should be on the accused to prove his innocence.

Other Safeguards—Property Laws, Desertion, Widowhood and Maintenance, Prohibition

112. The woman should have equal rights to ancestral property and even after marriage, she could claim it as and when she requires it. Also the property acquired after marriage must be in joint names and she must have the right in the matrimonial property when she is thrown out, divorced or widowed. The Government should give preference to widows and destitute women for government jobs, redistribution of land and in providing house sites for the houseless.

113. One of the most serious, if not the most serious, problem faced by women workers, whether home based or not, self-employed or not, is drunkenness on the part of their husbands and the consequences of this on the women. Wife beating, reduced if not non contribution towards the family upkeep by the husband out of his earnings, even depriving the women even of her meagre earnings, inculcating the habit of drink in the children and also in the women, etc. are some of the evils. Consideration for state revenues should not lead the government to view "Prohibition" unkindly. At least there must be total restriction on the production and sale of hard liquor. In the short run, the number of retail outlets should be reduced, number of days for sale reduced, location of outlets carefully selected, complete restriction on sale on pay day, payment of wages at least partly in kind and consultation with women's representatives on the opening of retail outlets and their locations—are some of the steps that should be taken.

114. Drug addiction which is also becoming a menace increasingly calls for similar preventive action.

## Major Areas Of Focus

### Technology and Self-employed Women

115. The question of the effects of the introduction of technology is a highly complex one. Technology is constantly entering and transforming all spheres of society. Furthermore, the effects of technology are felt at many different levels. They may be felt immediately or anytime in the future; they may be felt in the area where technology is introduced or anywhere else, nationally or even internationally; they may be felt by only one category of people or by the whole population; they may be felt in any or all spheres of society—social, economic, political etc. So, in order to judge the actual effect of a particular technology a multi-level, multi-dimensional study would have to be undertaken.

116. Here we will restrict our view to technology which affects work processes in which self-employed women are involved. We are not attempting to study the multi-dimensional effects of this technology but merely to make some observations on how self-employed women have so far been affected, how the negative effects can be scaled down and the positive effects increased.

### Displacement of Self-employed Women

117. The greatest effect of technology in the work process has been the displacement of self-employed workers from their traditional occupations. This displacement occurs in a variety of ways:

- (i) Direct displacement: This kind of displacement occurs when new machines or new processes are brought in to do work mechanically that the workers were doing

manually. Two recent examples are: In the coal mines loading and unloading is being done by contract labour both men and women. The introduction of loading—unloading machines has directly displaced these labourers. Again, Punjab is famous for its green revolution. Much of the farming operations of Punjab is done by agricultural labour brought in from Eastern India. Now the Ministry of Agriculture is encouraging the import of a 'Harvester-Combine' machine which would take over most of the farming process, thereby displacing thousands, perhaps lakhs of agricultural labourers.

- (ii) Displacement by takeover of market: This kind of displacement has been affecting mainly small producers and artisans whose traditional markets have been taken over by machine produced goods. There are abundant examples of this: traditional cobblers have been displaced by shoe companies like Batas, products of potters have been replaced by plastic goods, handloom weavers are today involved in a life and death struggle with the powerloom sector.
- (iii) Displacement by takeover of raw materials: Here again small producers are displaced because their raw material sources are taken over by mechanised sectors. Handloom weavers for example find it more difficult to get yarn because the mill sector gets first priority. Bamboo workers have to pay exorbitant prices for bamboo because the paper mills buy bamboo forests en masse.
- (iv) Displacement by destruction of environment: Lakhs of selfemployed people have lost their livelihood through large scale change (destruction) of the environment. The most obvious example is the destruction of forests by the timber industry whereby minor forest produce gatherers, small and marginal farmers, livestock keepers etc. who lived off the forest have completely lost their livelihood and had to migrate in search of new employment.

#### Effect of Displacement on Women

118. Although self-employed men and women are both affected by displacement, it is generally found that the effect on women is much more pronounced. The reasons for this are firstly, women are usually involved in the most unskilled manual work. These types of work are the first to be mechanised. Secondly, women are not given training in skills so when their unskilled operations are mechanised they are not reabsorbed in the workforce. Finally women's employment is rarely defended, by the trade unions and we have in fact come across cases where women's employer has been deliberately sacrificed by the unions.

#### Other Issues of Technology

119. Apart from the issue of displacement, technology may bring about:-

- (a) A higher production level
- (b) A higher income level
- (c) A change (for better or worse depending on the technology) in the health status of the worker
- (d) A reduction (or increase depending on the technology) in the drudgery of the worker.

120. However each new technology has a different effect and the effect of raising the health of the worker by outweighed by massive displacement. We are only suggesting that when a technology is being evaluated all the above issues should be used as criteria.

121. It is important to emphasise, while dealing with this issues, that technology is 'not given',

not an unalterable thing to be accepted as it is. Technology is developed by research and it is the need that creates a particular type of technology. This can be seen most clearly in drug technology where drugs are developed specifically for diseases. The disease determines the direction of the technological research. Similarly, in the case of work mechanisation, the direction in which the work process is desired to be altered determines the direction of technological research. The main question to be asked here is whose needs determine these technological directions? The answer to that question seems to be new technology creates higher profit margins for owners of large capital and therefore these owners determine the technology to be researched and applied. If however, technology is to be used for the benefits of the self-employed worker then their needs should determine (i) which existing technology is implemented and (ii) the direction of technological research.

### *Recommendations*

- (1) All new technologies should be screened by a high-powered committee from the point of view of the workers. Selfemployed women should be an important component of this committee. The criteria for screening should be given.
  - (a) Employment potential
  - (b) Income accruing to work
  - (c) Effect on drudgery
  - (d) Effect on health
- (2) Technologies which result in large unemployment should be banned.
- (3) Beneficial technologies should be encouraged with tax rebates etc.
- (4) The direction of research and development should be determined by the above committee.
- (5) Within the framework of policy, the Equal Opportunities Commission will have the authority to advise, investigate and decide all matters relating to various kinds of work.

### **Employment Guarantee**

122. Amelioration of the conditions of poor working women cannot be the sole objective of our exercise. We also seek to empower the woman to come into her own. This will be best achieved if we can create conditions under which the woman can earn a reasonable wage for her day's work and she can work on all the days that she is available and willing to work. Our recommendations, hope, will enable the women workers to earn reasonable wage for her labour. As for employment, our recommendations regarding fall back wage and retaining allowance will mitigate her hardship to an extent. But the real remedy lies only in a guarantee of employment. This employment guarantee becomes necessary and important in the context of increasing pauperisation of the rural people, occasioned by displacement from land, deforestation, large scale drought etc.

123. We, therefore, recommend that the "right to work" which now figures as a Directive Principle of state policy in our Constitution should be included as a Fundamental Right under the Constitution. This should be followed by a Central Legislation guaranteeing employment to all adults who are in need of employment and are willing to work. The law can be on the lines of the Employment Guarantee law of Maharashtra and should be applicable to the whole of India, in both urban and rural areas. While all existing employment schemes like NREP and RLEGP can be pressed into service for providing employment under the proposed law, the nature of schemes need not be confined to earth work, road making, stone breaking and the like but should be imaginatively drawn up to suit local needs and local resources. In the drawing up of these scheme, the local people, and more particularly the women, should have a predominant voice. Activities relating to maternity welfare, child care, nutrition, education,

eradication of adult illiteracy, health care, drinking water, drought relief measures, afforestation, wasteland reclamation and development, social forestry, local arts and crafts, rural housing etc. provide a a fertile and relevant source for generation of employment opportunities. The planning and implementing mechanisms need to be wholly revamped so as to reflect local initiative, local resources—both human and natural, and local needs.

### **Organisation for the Self-Employed**

124. It is generally agreed that unless a group is organised it will not be able to obtain any genuine improvement in its conditions. At present the self-employed sector, which constitute 88% of the workforce, is unorganised and unable to assert itself as a force. The question then is how do the self-employed organise and what types of organisations are most effective for them?

### **Organisational Structures**

125. We have in this section, been discussing how the legal structure affects the self-employed and what changes should be brought about in the laws. However, to bring about these changes it is necessary to have an organised group which would be willing to actively lobby for the changes. Even if these changes were brought about and new laws enacted, the law would remain a dead letter until there was pressure for its implementation. There are many examples all over the country where progressive laws exist but have had no impact because they remain unimplemented. The Minimum Wages Act, 19, Contract Labour Act, 19, Interstate Migrant Workers Act 19, are glaring examples. At the same time there are innumerable examples to show that these progressive legislation do get implemented where workers are able to organise and fight for their rights. The studies commissioned by this task force quote many such examples such as tobacco processing workers in Nipani, fisher people in Kerala, forest workers in Gujarat and mine workers in Chattisgarh. In short, the law is useful as an instrument of change for the self-employed only where the self-employed are organised.

126. On the other hand, the law can also be used as a tool to help to build up the organisations of the self-employed. A progressive law, such as the Minimum Wages Act, 19, or the Land Ceiling Act, 19, can be used as a rallying point for organising. Implementation of the Act can be a major demand for building up the organisation. This strategy has the advantage that the demands of the organisation remain strictly legal, and are able to generate support and sympathy because the workers are only asking for their dues under the law. It also becomes more difficult for the authorities to suppress such movements.

### **Organising and the Law**

127. The process of organising in response to a need, or around an issue, leads to the formation of an organisation. This organisation may or may not have a legal structure. Many cases have been documented where self-employed women form an organisation without making it a legal entity. They may form an unregistered Mahila Mandal and meet periodically to discuss common problems and issues. They may spontaneously come together to demand a higher income, or cheaper raw materials. Many women's groups form small savings and credit groups. The advantage of having such unregistered groups are:

- (i) They remain informal and flexible.
- (ii) There is no external interference especially from government agencies.
- (iii) Self-employed, illiterate women feel more comfortable, and more in control, dealing with such organisations where there are no formal procedures.

128. There are however certain disadvantages attached to unregistered informal groups such as:

- (i) It has sometimes been observed that the immediate need for which the workers have come together is satisfied (or fails to be satisfied) the organisation breaks up. There is no pressure on the members of the group to continue to interact. A legal entity on the other hand, with its necessary procedures of periodic meetings and activities provides a means for members to continually come together.
- (ii) A lack of separate identity: Generally an informal group is unable to build up an identity independent of its more active members. When these members cease to be active, the group dissolves. A legal entity acquires an identity apart from its members and the positions such as President and Secretary acquire an importance of their own, independent of the person occupying that position. The lack of a separate identity also means that the organisation cannot acquire assets capital. For example, if an informal group wants to open a bank account or an office, it has to be done in the private name of a member. This on the one hand places an extra burden of responsibility on the individual and on the other hand, opens the way for private control and gain.
- (iii) Lack of access to government schemes: The Government has many antipoverty schemes which could be of use of selfemployed women but which can be obtained only through registered organisations.

129. The different terms of organisation available to the selfemployed have been explored in a study by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia. Here we will summarise their findings.

An organisation can be registered:

- (i) As a society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- (ii) As a trust under the Indian Trust Act, 1882, or under the Charitable and Religious Trusts Act, 1920,
- (iii) A trade union under the Trade Union Act, 1926.
- (iv) A partnership firm under the Partnership Act, 1932.
- (v) A company under Companies Act 1956 or under Section 25 of Companies Act.
- (vi) A Cooperative Society under the Cooperative Societies Acts (each state has its own).

130. *The Society*: It is the easiest to register and most flexible form of organisation. It also can be democratic as it can have a broad membership which elects the executive body. It can accommodate various forms of activity such as income generation, struggle, research, awareness generation or any other activity that the members desire.

131. "The major limitations of society as a form of organisation is that in its original purpose and concept, it was conceived as a form meant to be utilized to provide services to a set of beneficiaries who were not members of the society. It was assumed that a set of members through their governing body would assist as set of beneficiaries" (from PRIA study).

132. *The Trust*: The trust is again a flexible organisation that provides from minimum government interference. However, like the Societies Act, 19, the Trust Act, 19, too envisages a charitable purpose for beneficiaries.

The trust is however a closed society and once appointed, trustees cannot be easily removed. It is not a democratic set up.

133. *The Partnership and the Company*: The Partnership Act, 1932, and the Companies Act, 1956, are designed to register businesses of various kinds. Recently the voluntary sector has begun to experiment with these form of organisations mainly to set up income generation programmes for the poor. However, very little experience has so far been generated in it.

134. *The Cooperative*: Each state has its own Cooperative Act with different provisions. A cooperative is an institution which aims at the economic and social betterment of its members through an enterprise which is based on mutual aid and which conforms to six principles.

1. Voluntary membership.
2. Democratic system.
3. Limited interest rate (on shares).
4. Equitable distribution.
5. Cooperative education.
6. Mutual Cooperation

135. In principle, the Cooperative is the ideal form of organisation for a group of self-employed women, but in practice the functioning of Cooperatives has not been conducive to the development of the poor. The main reason for lack of success of Cooperative is:

- (a) The richer people tend to take over the control of Cooperatives using it for their own purpose and exploiting the poor.
- (b) Governments have come to control Cooperatives through policy and law so that the actual members no longer exercise control.

136. *Trade Unions*: Have been used mainly as an instrument of struggle for women of different kinds. They are democratic organisations whose activity is for and by the members. They cannot however be used easily for development or income generation since their main purpose is to regulate relations between "workmen and employers or between workmen and workmen".

137. Which of these legal structures is most suitable for the organisation of self employed women? It was felt that the organisation should be of the women and not merely for the women. In other words, the self employed women should be running. The organisation which would articulate their needs and demands. Such an organisation should be democratic and have the capacity to involve the masses of self employed women. The two forms which fulfilled these criteria are the Cooperatives and the trade unions. In principle, at least, these are the ideal forms of organisation.

138. *Cooperative*: The first hurdle in running a Cooperative society is to get it registered. Many self employed women have found that registering a society itself is a major battle and may take 23 years, by which time most members have got discouraged. The reasons for difficulty in registration is:

1. Discouraging provisions under Cooperative Acts (see Samakhaya's paper).
2. Negative policies and inflexibility of interpretation (see Samakhaya's paper).
3. Extensive paper work which is most daunting to illiterate women.
4. Large scale corruption in Cooperative departments.

139. Once the Cooperative is actually registered, these same reasons lead to obstacles in the democratic and effective functioning of the Cooperative (see Samakhaya's paper.) In addition, once a Cooperative is actually on its feet and able to provide a respectable income to its members, there is an attempt on the part of vested interests to take over the Cooperative. A women's cooperative faces the additional problem that the men of the community try to shoulder the women aside and take over.

140. *Trade Union*: Until recently, the trade unions have remained mainly male-dominated and unsympathetic to the problems of women workers. Also trade unions have been concentrated mainly in factory-type of situation where there is a clear employer-employee relationship,

leaving out the mass of workers who are self employed. This is partly because the trade Union Act emphasises the relationship of employer and workmen. Also the trade unions mainly rely, on labour laws for their effectiveness. And as we have seen in the Labour laws section, these laws either have no provision or are difficult to implement for the self-employed sector. Yet another reason for ignoring the self-employed sector is that the trade unions finance themselves only through membership fees and the poor are unable to contribute much by way of fees.

141. Both cooperatives trade unions, mass-based organisations, have today become the power-base for many political parties. This has resulted in a tie-in between the political system and these organisation with both acting together to keep out the self-employed, poor workers.

## Organisation and Women

It is only after 1975 that women have been encouraged to form and join organisations for their improvement. The earlier trend was to perceive women as beneficiaries of Social action rather than actors in their own organisations.

The question now facing self employed women's organisations is—should they form separate organisations or should their organisations be integrated with those of self employed men. It is found that there is a need both for separatism as well as for integration. The need for being separate arises because in our culture women are not accepted as equals. In a joint organisation, the men do not allow women to articulate their needs or to take positions of leadership. Women too are afraid to speak in front of men and tend to remain suppressed.

142. Secondly, women have less contact with the outside world and less knowledge of the law. So their learning process is slower than that of men. In a joint organisation men tend to end up doing most of the tasks, as they do them better.

143. Thirdly, concerns such as child care, housework, and maternity which have been traditionally women's affairs are given less importance and women began to feel left out of the organisation.

144. Fourthly, women get less support from their men-folk at home when they join mixed organisation, than when they join women's organisations.

145. In a separate organisation women are able to build up their strength, powers of articulation, unity, leadership and knowledge leading towards eventual equality.

146. Contrasted to this need for separation is a need for integration at another level. Generally self employed men and women are agricultural labourers, vendors or construction workers, sometimes they work as a team creation a product together as in case of household weavers. Many of the basic problems and issues they face as workers are the same. The need for organisation is felt for both sexes. Furthermore they need to organise to build unit with one another. If only women organise the impact of the organisation will be much less as it will represent only  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the workers.

147. Two alternatives have been suggested and tried out to have both integration and separatism. The first is to have men and women as members of the organisation, but to create a women's wing within the organisation. This is the path that has been chosen by many trade unions. The advantage of this is that men and women remain united. The disadvantage is that the women's wing will receive no importance and women will remain subordinate within the organisation. This method is successful only if adequate attention is given to develop the women into a powerful section and to give women equal leadership within the organisation.

148. The second alternative is to have separate women and men's organisations, but have the two act together on mutual issues, as SEWA has tried to do. The advantage is that



self employed women can develop strong organisations this way. The disadvantage is that unless men's organisations also develop, this strategy does not work. At the same time the men's organisation must also have similar goals as the women's organisation so that the two can work together. In this case it is necessary for the women's organisations to be alert and consciously promote men's organisation so that the men do not remain unorganised.

### **Support Services**

149. We have in various parts of this report made suggestions and recommendations that will enable the women workers acquire their rightful place in the production system. Our recommendations, by and large, relate to legal provisions and legal remedies. To enable the women to take advantage of the law, it is necessary to provide for appropriate and adequate legal aid and advice to the women, these being made available at places as close to the women, these being made available at places as close to the women, workers as possible. Special provisions must be made for this purpose by the state Governments under the Legal Services Authorities Act, supplemented by what social action groups and voluntary organisations can do in the matter. One of the main thrusts of these activities must be to enable women to develop organisations on their own which will help them to self reliant and self confident. Wide dissemination of information on the legal provisions for benefit of women, development programmes and delivery systems for women, must be made in local languages through printed publications, media, seminars, workshops and camps etc.

150. The Family Courts Act of 1984 does not seem to have made much headway and a beginning has been made only in two states—Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The reluctance of the State Government in implementing the law makes us feel as little apprehensive as to whether all that we have said is likely to be put aside. It is to guard against this that we have elsewhere recommended the setting up of a high powered Equal Opportunities Commission.

151. We have elsewhere recommended that maternity benefits and child care must be made universally available in the country. The necessary administrative infrastructure will have to be built up and in doing this, we recommend that provision of maternity benefits must be linked with health care, such as giving of anti-tetanus injections. Linkwise, linking of these activities with registration of births and deaths could also be thought of.

152. Regarding cash payment of maternity benefits, it will be advantageous if this is entrusted to the agency providing maternity and child care; such payments, should as far as possible, be made to the women concerned and in the village itself.

153. Without repeating what we have recommended on maternity benefits in an earlier chapter, we want to reiterate here that maternity and child care are perhaps the most crucial elements that will have to be adequately provided for, if anything worthwhile has to be done to help poor women workers.

154. Creches for children have to be established irrespective of the number of women workers or children. In rural areas every village and habitation has to have a creche, which can preferably be located near the school and where the working mother can leave her baby (or babies) and go to work. This will require creches to be kept open from about 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. The working hours are to be flexible depending on the needs of the workers and on the location/season. It is also necessary to make creche facilities available to all children and not merely of women workers. This is particularly so in the case of Urban and semi urban areas.

155. Where the laws provide for creche facilities to be provided the limits on numbers of women or children (as in the plantation Labour Act may be relaxed and provision also made for these to be provided, where feasible, by a group of employers instead of by each employer.

156.4.4.8. The existing infrastructure under the ICDS may be expanded and utilised. The

parents will have to be associated with the working of these centres.

157. A widespread scheme of mobile creches will have to evolved for looking after the children of migrant labour, like those in construction where the work-sites are shifting and permanent creche facilities may not be feasible.

158. We have referred to the need for reservation of seats for women candidates under the apprenticeship schemes in Industrial Training Institute and other institutions, particularly in trades and occupations which are generally considered as "non-traditional" for women. Likewise, even in the educational field, reservation for women should be made, wherever necessary, consistent with our objective of increasing the percentage of women in all employments. Generally the percentage of women in educational institutions is much higher than in institutions relating to other disciplines, and this is reflected in the relatively higher percentage of women in medical and health related activities. This is essentially because we tend to characterise these activities as suitable for women. We want to change this kind of typological segregation and would want to see women participating in equal numbers with men in all activities. The educational and training arrangements would have to be looked at in that light and appropriate reservations made coupled with adequate facilities provided.

159. Alongside of these recommendations relating to employment, training and education, we consider that it will be necessary to extend the scope of reservation to items like credit, allotment of work place, supply of scarce commodities and raw materials and marketing facilities. All women organisations must be given preference in these and other matters; experience seems to be the reverse, judging by the difficulties, which are more than the ordinary, faced by women cooperatives getting themselves registered.

160. We were also informed that in a leading public sector establishment, there is an arrangement which provides for a woman worker to nominate a male member of her family, say her husband or son, provided she is willing to quit employment. If this is the kind of attitude that we have in the matter of women in employment, then we can't change it too soon.

### **Equal Opportunities Commission**

161. We have, in the preceding chapters, made suggestions and recommendations on a variety of issues; these essentially, referred to existing or proposed legislative provisions. Our purpose in making these recommendations is to empower the women workers through legislative measures as well as organisational arrangements so that the women workers in the unorganised sectors are not merely viewed as beneficiaries; these women workers should not merely become visible and get their due place in the scheme of things but also ultimately become the arbiters of their own destiny.

162. It is our hope that in the years to come the suggestions and recommendations made by us will lead to that objective. Even so, we think it is necessary to establish an authority which will have overseeing functions to ensure equality of status and opportunities for women not merely in their role as workers but in all spheres of life. We recommended very strongly the establishment of a permanent Equal Opportunities Commission consisting of five or six persons of eminence, of whom more than half should be women. In making this recommendation and in describing the scope and functions of such a Commission, we have been guided somewhat by the arrangements that exist in some other countries from whom we were able to obtain some material. In Japan, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law or the law for the promotion of equal opportunity and Treatment between men and women in employment and other welfare Measures for women workers, to give its full name, provides for the setting up of or Equal Employment Opportunity Mediation Commission, in each prefecture to formulate mediation plans and recommendations for the parties in dispute to

accept it.

163. As against this, in Britain, the Equal Opportunities Commission established under the sex Discrimination Act has the following functions. It works "towards the elimination of sex discrimination and to promote equal opportunities between men and women generally. It keeps the working of both the sex Discrimination and Equal pay Acts under review any may submit proposals for amending them to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Employment respectively. The Commission advises people of their rights under the legislation and may assist complainants who believe that they have been treated in an unlawfully discriminatory way to prepare and conduct a case before a court or tribunal. The Commission has power to conduct formal investigations and to require a person to attend hearings to give evidence, and, if satisfied that a practice is unlawful, can issue notices requiring it to be stopped. It may also attempt to resolve complaints without recourse to litigation or formal investigation (in 1983, 359 complaints were dealt with in this way). It undertakes, and assists others to undertake, research, educational and publicity work. The Commission consists of a full-time chairman, a part-time deputy chairman, and 12 part-time members, and received a government grant of some 3 million in 1983-84. Northern Ireland has its own discrimination legislation, passed in 1976, and its own Commission."

164. In the United States of America, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was created in 1965 as a Federal Agency to administer and enforce Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. "EEOC has rendered most employment discrimination illegal on a nationwide basis. It receives and investigates job discrimination complaints which may be filed by an employee, a group of employees, job applicants or organisations on behalf of aggrieved individuals. In addition, the five commissioners, who are appointed by the president, may, and do, initiate charges. A part of the EEOC complaint resolution process includes deferral to states which have equal opportunity laws comparable to Title VII. As of 1975, 36 States, including the District of Columbia, and 14 local fair employment practice agencies had authority to grant or seek relief from discrimination prohibited by the Civil Rights Act, as amended, by 1981 the number had risen to 69. The complaints filed with these agencies provide information to the EEOC on the types of discrimination experienced by women and minorities and the remedies needed to ensure equal opportunity. The deferral of authority to State and local agencies has also provided for greater coverage for the affected classes, defined under Title VII as sex, race, color, religion, or national origin. न्यायमेव नयते

165. EEOC monitors employer activities in the area of equal opportunity through the annual reports required of the larger private employers (100 or more employees). These reports set forth the makeup of the work force under major occupational categories for each of four minority groups-Black, Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native. Data in the reports are the only source of comprehensive (annual) employment statistics by occupational categories for minorities and women in private industry, and are presented for the nation as a whole, each state, standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, and smaller geographic areas, such as counties. These data have been used by EEOC to target employers for investigation of systemic discrimination; decisions to investigate systemic issues are made by EEOC commissioners.

166. The EEOC also enforces the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act. The Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from paying different wages, because of sex, to women and men doing substantially equal (not necessarily identical) work in the same establishment. Employers also are prohibited by the Equal Pay Act reducing wages of either sex to comply with the law, and labour organisations are forbidden to cause employers to violate the Act. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act prohibits employers,

employment agencies and unions from employment practices discriminating against persons 40-70 years of age. (There is no upper age limit with respect to employment by the Federal Government.) This protection under the law can be particularly important to women reentering the work force after an extended period of full-time family responsibility."

167. The EEOC issues from time to time sex discrimination guidelines, sexual harassment guidelines and also uniform guidelines on employees selection procedures, and affirmative action guidelines.

168. In the light of these developments abroad and keeping in view the conditions obtaining in our own country, we recommend an Equal Opportunities Commission to be set up under a Central Law which must have wide powers of investigations, direction advise and monitoring. It ought to have like the MRTP Commission of ours, a separate wing for investigation which can take up investigation either on a complaint or a reference made, or suomoto. The Commission in Britain undertakes promotional and educational work, providing advice to employees and employers, to trade unions and professional bodies and the Central and the State Governments. It would also be empowered to make grants to other bodies and individuals for independent research projects or for educational activities or training programmes. It will also have its own research services. Such a Commission would be a watch-dog organisation, with teeth, to oversee the implementation of laws and policies in all areas involving women, including employment, conditions of work, provision of maternity and child care facilities, property fights including right over that rimonial property, educational opportunities and training opportunities. The Commission may be required to present to parliament each year a report on its activities and findings; this report must be enabled to be discussed in both houses of Parliament as well as in the various State Legislatures in adequate detail. This Commission, the existence of which must be widely made known, would be a forum whose doors would always be open to anyone, more particularly women, who have not received a fair and equal deal at someone's hands.

### **New Structures Tripartite Boards**

169. In a brief paragraph on "construction workers" in the section on Labour Law we had mentioned the compulsive necessity for setting up Tripartite Boards, consisting of workers, employers and government representatives for regulating the employers and employment of workers in the industry and also to take on the responsibility and assume the authority for implementing the law and for payment of wages, provision of welfare, social security benefits, dispute resolution and the

170. Again, in the sub-section relating to "Home-based women workers" in the same section we have unhesitatingly recommended the enactment of a new law for these workers, the key element in which is the establishment of Tripartite Boards we have opted in favour of this, in preference to a law for however workers on the lines of the Bidi and Cigar workers (conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, for the reason that no law, however well conceived, will be of benefit to these workers unless the have a major hand in the implementation of these laws, and this could be achieved only by a Tripartite Board of the type we have in view.

171. Some of the study groups set up have also come up with the same kind of suggestion. The study group on Forest (women workers has recommended such Boards under both the Inter-state Migrant Workers Act, 1979, for registration of workers and provision of facilities and the Indian forest Act for redressing the grievances of the workers engaged—collection of various forest produces or of fire wood, bamboo and for issue of transport pass and allotment of forest land.

172. The study team on fisheries (women workers) has suggest the creation of Tripartite Committees consisting of representative of Govt. womens trade unions and concerned voluntary organisation for registration and licensing of women workers skill development and for enforcing ne legislations, starting with the Inter-state Migrant workers Act, 1979.

173. The study on women construction workers has also recommended the constitution of Tripartite Boards; we have already dealt with this in para 1 above.

174. In recommending the formation of Tripartite Boards (in which workers will have as many representatives as the Govt. and employers together have and in which women workers will be adequately represented, and in which the workers representatives wil be democratically elected by the workers concerned), we are not merely looking at these Boards as more efficient implementing agencies. Proper implementation is no doubt very important and crucial, but we consider these Boards to be even more crucial for the purpose of making these women workers visible and of bringing to focus the contribution they make to the family income and to the economy and above all in empowering them, it understand their rights and to demand them—not merely as beneficiaries under any paternalistic system by as partners and participants in a production process. Given the nature of shifting employer—employee relationship and even the denial of such relationship and the consequent difficulty in even getting due wages paid in full and on time, the case for Tripartite needs no arguement. There is no other method by which employer-employee nexus can be established, the Tripartite Board arrangement providing for a corpus of employers and corpus of employees, instead of individual employer with his employees. In this type of arrangement, it will also be possible for the Board to take on planning functions in respect of the activity concerned, to encourage promotion of cooperatives wherever feasible with the Board helping the cooperate in the matter of supply of raw materials and marketing.

175. Apart from the levy, over and above the wages payable, imposed on the individual employers to finance various welfare and social security measures in addition to meeting the cost of administration, it may also be desirable that levy is imposed on the major industries or substitute industries for the benefit of the small activities that the home based workers carry on. Even now, there is the practice of levying a cess on the organised cotton textile mill sector for helping the handloom sector. In the beedi rolling industry, a levy is imposed on the bidis rolled for financing welfare activities for the workers. Similar arrangements could be though of including a levy on exports for example on the garment export industry or gem cutting industry; likewise the plastic industry could be made to contribute for the welfare of worker in these sectors where the demand for their product are adversely affected by competition from the plastic goods Sources of such additional finding can be explored.

176. All dues payable by the employer towards wages or levy must be made the first charge; their recovery where it becomes necessary, must be through a summary procedure. To ensure that no defaults occur, it wuld be necessary to have some hold on the activities of the employer, either through licensng authorities or tax authorities.

# 6

## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

**T**o understand the occupational aspects of health, it is necessary to have a detailed examination of women's work in terms of the actual activity undertaken, the hours of work entailed, the remuneration, if any, and the effects of all these on their nutritional status and physical as well as mental health. To understand the issues pertaining to the nature of a woman's occupation, it is necessary to analyse them in terms of the types of physical stresses involved in the movements required, the postural positions, and their effects, and the noxious materials used. Long hours and inadequate wages further exacerbate the occupation related health problems of women and, hence, are also examined with respect to the occupation under discussion.

2. The effects of working environment on health include lack of adequate lighting insanitary conditions, poor air flow, working in the open elements and such other factors likely to affect her physical condition. Mental stresses are also viewed with respect to the factors associated with their work. Lastly, it is essential to examine those benefits and protective legislation, which affect women's health such as minimum wages (as purchasing food and adequate, nutritional status are directly related to them), access to health services, maternity benefits and creches (which decrease her tension with respect to child care while at work).

3. All working class women work, whether they are wage-labourers or not. Labour in the home is not only reproductive and social with regard to the upbringing of the family and care-taking functions, but also productive, as women's work replaces goods and services, which would, otherwise, be purchased in the market, such as fetching water, gathering fuel and fodder, grinding cereals, maintaining cattle, kitchen gardens, weeding, winnowing, harvesting, and a myriad other functions such as tailoring, maintaining the house structure and repairing it, and tutoring children. Hence, it can be said very confidently, that there are fewer **women** than men who do not work at all. In fact, if women work outside the home, they are

consistently working a double (and when children etc. are ill, a triple shift), day after day. Women, on an average, have much longer total hours of work than men.<sup>1</sup>

4. One-third of women, at least, and in some instances, a higher proportion, are the sole supporters of their families. This has been brought out in many research reports. A recent study of two villages, sponsored by the Health Task Force of the Commission, in a chronically drought-prone area in Maharashtra also very clearly brings out the contribution of the women workers in the economy of the area. The major source of income for women in this area was work in the Employment Guarantee Scheme. The men went in for work on private sites. For the same work, women received less than half of what the men received. Yet, in 20 per cent of the households women's income was 100 per cent of family income. In another 20 per cent of the households, women's income constituted at least 50 per cent of the family income. This in effect meant that women worked at least twice as much as the men in economically productive work, and their income was the mainstay of the family's economy.

5. In addition, the women were also responsible for almost 100 per cent of the housework—"socially productive labour." They were also responsible for 100 per cent of the "reproductive labour"—the bearing and rearing of the children.<sup>2</sup>

6. Thus, the contribution to society made by women's work is far greater than of men. Though fewer women than men have opportunities to work outside the home, the work which women do within the home—cooking, washing and cleaning, caring for children and the old, nursing the ill, fetching fuel and water, is work which is crucial to the survival of society. If women stop doing this work, and no one takes it up, all factories, transport, construction, food-production and so on will come to a standstill, disease and hunger will spread, and very soon people will start dying. So if we look at the social usefulness of their work alone, it looks as if women ought to have more bargaining power than anyone else, because it is their work which produces, nurtures and sustains the people, who produce everything else. But this is not at all the case. In fact, quite the opposite.<sup>3</sup>

7. The fact that women are house-workers as well, affects their status within wage-work adversely. It confines them to badly paid work, marginal jobs, which are supposed to be 'women's work'. Though women-headed households constitute a large proportion of households in the country, yet the idea of the working women only "supplementing" the household economy has become a fixed notion of potential employers and, despite legislation women continue to be pushed into low-paying categories of jobs, which remain low-paying because women work in those jobs. Instead of enhancing women's status, each of the different roles women play, while performing the different aspects of social labour, works against the other roles. This is reflected, among other things, in the fact that many women have to work, up to the last day of pregnancy and return to work within a month, endangering their own health and that of their children. The vicious circle, rather than being broken, is reinforced by other factors, thus depressing the situation of women further.

8. The truth is that the contribution of women to the family, and to the economy, has not been evaluated, quantified, or even recognised. One has merely to shut one's eyes and visualise an all-women's strike for just a couple of weeks and see the massive chaos, destruction and havoc that would ensue—at least a couple of times greater than an all-men's strike. Hence, the statistics regarding the contribution of women's work is not even the tip of the iceberg. On the contrary, the figures indicate not the extent of women's labour, but only the extent to which it is even marginally recognised and paid. It indicates that a greater part of it is unpaid and that the burden and loss is women's alone of labouring, poor women—those who are unorganised, self-employed and remain unprotected. This section constitutes more



than 94 per cent of the female workforce of this country. It is increasing each year, as fewer and fewer women continue to be absorbed in the "formal" sector.<sup>4</sup> Besides, the few opportunities available to women especially those employed in the informal sector to participate in other areas of life, depend crucially on their access to the opportunity to be healthy. On the other hand, the obstacles to their achieving even the simple state of well-being are tremendous and emanate from almost every institution and structure with which they are in relationship, even remotely. Poor women have no access to education or training. In order to make both ends meet, they have to work, most often, in the unorganised industry, and health hazards are manifold. They cannot take time off from their work, either for illness or before and after delivery. Their access to health care is reduced considerably by the distances from health care facilities, lack of time to go there, the difficulty in making the other members of the household interested in their health needs, and the costs. All these factors play against them and then particularly vulnerable to various chronic and acute illnesses, most of which, like anaemia, they carry along with them and suffer till they become severely handicapping or even fatal.

#### Findings

##### **Some Common Problems Related to Occupations in the Informal Sector**

9. In terms of the health problems women face specifically in their occupations, certain trends and tendencies about the nature of women's work and their health problems are discernible.

Problems related to the posture at work

10. The paper-bag makers in Delhi suffer constant stress and exhaustion, thus falling prey to a host of chronic illnesses. Their bodies ache from constantly sitting in one position, their backs



She is concerned about her health provided she has the time and access to health care.



grow bent from constantly having to stoop. They suffer particularly from pain in the back, shoulders and waist, and stiffness in joints. Their eyes ache and water from hours of strain.

11 This is equally true of beedi workers, zardozi and zari workers, chikan workers, lace makers weavers, gunny bag stitchers, carpet-makers, tagai workers., in short the entire work force of women who are involved in strenuous work, usually working at home.

## 2. Problems of being in contact with hazardous material

12. Constant contact with woodsmoke, cashew oil, gases like carbon monoxide and formaldehyde, chemical fumes in the electronics industry, tobacco dust, oils, and silica dust, is an occupational hazard. The cashew workers in Kerala say, After working in this department for a month, our fingers start burning because of the extra oil coming out when we break the shell on the machine. Boils and abscesses appear on our hands.

13. The fingers of the women look as though they have been afflicted with leprosy. Protective gloves are not given to the women.

14. The Bintoashale stone dust, which is thrown in the air while producing slate-pencils in the Mandsaur district in Madhya Pradesh, is in fact, silicosis, which is exacerbated by increase in the severity and duration of exposure. The mean age of the workers who were killed was 34.65



Many of her occupations pose unavoidable health hazards.

years. There have been 3,000 deaths of slate-pencil workers in the last decade.<sup>7</sup> The use of chemicals fertilisers creates skin reactions on hands and feet.

15. In all of the diverse occupations ranging from housework, domestic work, and laundering on the one hand, and photo-copying, electronics on the other, with mining, agriculture and construction somewhere in between that women are engaged in, there are numerous debilitating health hazards.

#### Problems related to their work environment

16. These include, lack of light, latrines, water, ventilation, space, Small, poorly-lit and ill-ventilated homes, in crowded mahallas and streets, serve as both the living space and workplace for almost all home-based workers.<sup>8</sup> Inadequate lighting, long working hours spent doing extremely fine, minute work like chikan embroidery, lace-making, zari and zardozi embroidery, and tagai work cause severe problems like poor vision, eye-strain and headaches, and also accidents.

17. In all small-scale factories too, women work in cramped conditions in rooms which have extremely high temperatures—glass industry, garments etc. In the garment factories, women are often employed to iron the finished garments. Many women are known to have fainted due to the heat and humidity in the atmosphere. Most of these factories do not even provide women with toilet facilities. As a result, women try and eat and drink very little during the day. This results in constipation and other related health problems.

18. Women in the mining industry, in agriculture, women vendors<sup>10</sup> have the opposite problems—having to work in the open all through the day, in the hot sun or rains. This, apart from other effects, causes them to sweat, losing very precious water and salts.

#### Problems related to their work actions

19. Tying, stitching, banging, lifting, bending all lead to health problems, than 3,000 women in Jaipur are involved in the tying process of the tie and dye work. They spend almost the entire day tying extremely minute designs on yards and yards of cloth. They have deep cuts and dents on their fingers from the metal contraption they have to use and from the thread (personal conversations).

20. The block-printers in Ahmedabad manually print *sarees* and bed-sheets. The blocks are dipped in the semiliquid colour and placed carefully on the cloth and then the women have to strike the top of the block twice or thrice rapidly and hard, usually with both their hands in turn, sometimes with one. In one minute, they print about 12 times, i.e.,  $12 \times 3 = 36$  strokes with their hands and shoulders. Their fingers become rough due to the constant contact with the dye. The sides of the palm, which they strike on the block, are hard and have toughened. Their arms and shoulders too ache very badly (personal conversations).

#### Problems related to lifting weights

21. Lifting heavy weights is one of the "job descriptions" of women involved in construction, on employment guarantee schemes and brick-workers. These give rise to health problems like menstrual disorders, prolapse of the uterus, miscarriages, back problems, especially those relating to the spinal column, causing serious long-term repercussions.<sup>11</sup> Accidents and injuries, to the children are also other serious health problems that women have to face, due to non-availability of creches at the worksite where the children play around.

#### Problems related to their long hours of work

22. Most of the serious health problems get aggravated due to the long hours of work the

women have to put in.

23. The postural problems that women in beedi-making, chikan, zari, zardozi, paper-bag making, lace-making, and houseworkers face, get much worse as the women work for 8 to 14 hours a day, day after day. The chemicals, fumes, gases, dusts that women miners, women in slate-pencil making, in electronics, in fish-processing, and in the cashew industry, face, worsen the health problems and culminate in serious morbidity or even death due to the long period of exposure each day. Continuous actions like bending, crouching, banging, lifting, also aggregate the health problems.

24. Long and continuous exposure and lack of rest in order to recover from the health impairment due to continuous work, take a high toll of women's health.

#### Problems due to the repetitiousness of the movements

25. When women lift heavy weights, there are certain problems women face, prolapse of the uterus, miscarriages and back problems. But when they do the same work over and over again, the health problems are compounded many times more.

26. On the other hand, when women in the electronics industry spend day after day fitting in the circuits and use only one part of their bodies, hands and shoulders, in repetitive movements, they often suffer, from a condition termed tenosynovitis. Also repetitive movements reduce the mind to a drugged state which not only causes extreme fatigue of the mind, but is also known to cause accidents which may be dangerous to limb or life.

#### Problems related to technology

27. Technology has been a double-edged sword, especially because in this society, the controllers of technology and the ultimate users of it are totally different sets of people, with different interests and concerns. Most technological developments are introduced with the aim of maximising profits. These often negatively affect the people involved in production, especially women workers. Thus, on the one hand, machines are being introduced to make beedis faster, or in the bead-piercing activity, or in weaving, or in the coal mines, but it results in the displacement and retrenchment of women workers, without offering them any alternatives, either in employment for the existing workforce or, alternative training facilities for the future workforce. With the already meagre sources of livelihood and survival diminishing, many women will be forced to do more strenuous work or be more malnourished.

28. On the other hand, work which is strenuous and hazardous, due to the primitiveness of the methods and tools, e.g. harvesting and weeding, is either left untouched by technology or it is beyond the means of most women e.g. LPG cylinders instead of the primus stove or the woodfuel.

29. The use of technology, through mechanisation of certain production processes, has not only increased, but qualitatively and quantitatively worsened, the health hazards for certain sectors of the workforce. The use of machines in the production of slate pencils as well as in mining, has rendered finer, and hence more easily inhalable, the silica and other dust flying in the air. However, there is no accompanying investment in measures to protect workers from the ill-effects of this "technological advance". This dust is not obstructed in the nasal passage, but passes smoothly upto the lungs. The older workers in the Mandsaur slate-pencil factories have noticed that both morbidity and death have increased since the advent of the machines in the slate factories.<sup>15</sup>

#### Problems related to mental health

30. The very unorganised nature of the "informal sector" women working in it are subject to

leads to various forms of oppression, including sexual oppression, they vary from rape, forced prostitution and sexual harassment to wife-beating, the unequal sexual division of labour at home and at work, and restrictions on the freedom to move about.

31. The constant tension and anxiety of this situation, results in continuous stress on the women. While men workers experience exploitation at the workplace, women workers experience both exploitation and oppression, not only at the workplace, but also in society and at home.

32. Sexual exploitation is regularly experienced by almost all sections of women in the informal sector, for example, nurses experience it from doctors and village politicians;<sup>16</sup> women domestic workers, from the masters of the houses they work in;<sup>17</sup> women sweepers<sup>18</sup> and rag-pickers,<sup>19</sup> from their male colleagues; prostitutes<sup>20</sup> from the police,<sup>21</sup> the clients and the local goondas; the vendors,<sup>21</sup> from male buyers and sellers, the gate-keepers of the buildings they go to sell their wares and from the police; for the workers in the processing industry and small-scale factories,<sup>22</sup> from their supervisor, employers and male colleagues; for women working in agriculture,<sup>23</sup> from the landlords, employers, and the forest guards etc.

### Specific Health Problems Related to their Occupations

33. Following is a tabular representation of some of the *known* health hazards in various occupations in which women in the informal sector are involved, and some concrete recommendations to improve their health. Some points need to be kept in mind while noting the contents:

1. These are some of the known health problems. Considerable research needs to be undertaken to find out more about these occupations, as well as others which have not been researched at all.

2. Almost every woman in the informal sector performs a multiplicity of roles and activities. They are involved in activities like housework, child bearing, child-care, fuel and fodder gathering, carrying of water and many others, *besides* their economic activity. Thus, the hazards that women have to face are multiple.

3. Most women in the informal sector also face a number of health problems by virtue of being poor, labouring women-malnutrition, anaemia, discriminatory treatment, multiple pregnancies, severe deficiencies, the burden of contraception, sexual assault and harassment and mental trauma.

34. The occupation, some of the known health hazards and some of the concrete recommendations are as follows:

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<b>Manual Agricultural workers</b> 34-33 (Postural problems exposure to dusts and chemicals; un-guarded implements; working barefoot)	<b>General</b> Generalised body ache; aches in calves, hips, back, legs and shoulders; nasal catarrh irritating coughs, irritation of the respiratory system; respiratory allergies; respiratory tract	1) The hours of work should be regulated through the guarantee of a living wage and security of alternative employment in certain

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
	infections; tightness of chest; chest capacities; pneumoconiosis; cutaneous allergies; skin irritation; rashes and pruritus; mycosis; eye irritation; paddy keratitis; helminthiasis—schistosomiasis, ankylostomiasis; paronocia; fungal infections in feet; eczema; osteomyelitis of fingers.	periods. 2) Proper implementation of laws regarding guarding of machinery. 3) Warning and training about the use of chemicals. 4) Provision of protective equipment. 5) Alternative work allocation during pregnancy and in the post-natal period. 6) Education and dissemination of information about the possible health hazards. 7) Research into the toxicology of the materials used. 8) Provision of health and medical facilities.
	<b>Injuries</b> High rate of thresher accidents, especially while crushing sugarcane and ginning cotton; also serious physical injuries occur from the cutting edges of implements, such as sickles and machetes; for lack of first-aid facilities, small injuries become serious and often lead to tetanus.	
	<b>Toxicities</b> Pesticide poisoning; intestinal respiratory and neurological disorders; nausea; vomiting; abdominal cramps; diarrhoea, cough; headaches; vertigo; blurred vision; muscular twitching; convulsions; loss of reflexes; loss of sphincter control; disturbance of equilibrium; jaundice; coma, and ultimately, death may result by respiratory arrest.	
	<b>Gynaec</b> Abortions; premature deaths and still births; high rate of neo-natal, infant and maternal mortality.	
<b>Cotton-pickers and Podopeners</b> 34 (lack of personal protective equipment; heavy workload due to piece-rates)	Bleeding of fingers	1) Provision of personal protective equipment; 2) Payment of daily wages.
<b>Plantation workers</b> 35-37 (inhalation of dust; exhaustion due to heavy workloads, further increased by piece-rated wages and by high environmental temperatures and humidity; lack of health and medical services, working barefoot)	Lung infections and bronchial problems; physical stress; malnutrition; Helminthie infestations; dysenteries; contact dermatitis and other contact diseases; heat stroke; high incidence of maternal and child mortality	1) Regulation of hours of work through guaranteeing a living wage and regular employment. 2) Provision of personal protective equipments. 3) Provision of health and medical facilities. 4) Alternate work allocation during and after pregnancy. 5) Warning and training about the use of chemicals.

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
		6) Proper food supplements. 7) Education about the possible health hazards.
<b>Tea-pickers</b> (Working with unsafe chemicals; unsafe work terrain)	<b>38-39</b> Insect and snake bites; allergies; occupational of bronchi; pesticide hazards; accidents and falls due to steep slopes; pain in back due to carrying heavy loads.	1) Provision of personal protective equipment; 2) Reduction in workloads by providing a living wage on a daily or time basis. 3) Provision of medical and health facilities.
<b>Nomadic sheep-herders</b> (Continuous walking over rough terrain; lack of medical facilities)	Pain in joints; cuts in feet; miscarriages; high rate of infant mortality. (Personal Conversations)	1) Provision of sheds. 2) Institute a scheme of trained mobile paramedics as exists for mobile teachers in Kashmir.
<b>Mine workers</b> <b>40-51</b> (exposure to mineral dusts; extremely hazardous working conditions; lack of timely diagnosis)	Pneumoconiosis (a collective name of lung diseases caused by the continued inhalation of dust); increased respiratory ailments; cancer of the lungs; stomach, liver, kidneys and the central nervous system are affected by toxic dusts; deaths due to accidents	1) Reduction in dust levels; 2) Immediate implementation of existing laws. 3) Proper diagnosis and treatment. 4) Workers should have to right to decide the safety of the mine and act on it. 5) Regulation of working hours through guaranteeing a living wage.
<b>Quartz Crushers and mine workers</b> <b>52</b>	Silicosis; cough and expectoration; dyspnoea; chest pain high morality rates among young workers.	6) Provision of comfortable personal protective equipment. 7) Nutritional supplements 8) Provision of health and medical services.
<b>Qarry-workers (Chrome)</b> (Exposure to high temperatures; lack of eye protection)	Heat strokes; severe eye problems as chips of alloys fly into the eyes.	1) Frequent rest periods; 2) Provision of sheds and rest rooms; 3) Provision of drinking water and mineral salts at the work-site. 4) Provision of personal protective equipment.
<b>Construction workers</b> <b>53-62</b> (heavy work load; unsafe noise levels; exposure to dusts and chemicals; accident-prone working conditions contract labour)	Physical stress and strain; skeletal defects; numbness of hands and fingers; loss of hearing; stress; high blood pressure; muscular pain; intestinal problems; gastroenteritis; respiratory problems; asthma; silicosis; asbestosis; skin diseases; heat cramps and sun burns; serious accident injuries, deaths; spontaneous miscarriages; high rate of infant mortality; a feeling of isolation and rootlessness	1) Regulation of employer-employee relations; 2) Strict provision of scaffolding. 3) Reduction in noise levels; 4) Provision of personal protective equipment. 5) Alternative work for women during and after pregnancy. 6) Guarantee of a living wage. 7) Reduction in working hours.

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<b>Employment Guarantee Scheme Workers 63</b> (postural problems; unsafe implements; lack of sheds; heavy workloads; lack of health and medical services)	Backaches; abdominal pains; pains in hands, feet, knees, and shoulder-joints; increase in pain in the knees with age; splitting headaches, and migraines- nausea; giddiness; vomiting; loss of appetite; leucorrhea; cramps in legs; dizziness and abortions.	1) Proper wage rates to make possible frequent rest periods. 2) Provision of sheds and drinking water. 3) Alternative work during and after pregnancy e.g. running creches at EGC work-sites
<b>Brick-workers 64-65</b> (lack of personal protective equipment no precautions for work in hot atmosphere; contract and bonded labour; continuous heavy work loads, even during pregnancy)	Heat exhaustion; burn blisters and wounds on hands; constant infections of the wounds; cracking, roughening and blistering of hands; aching of feet; pain in shoulders, back and neck; coughing; chest pains; premature aging; injuries due to accidents to the women and children; prolapse of the uterus, often resulting in hysterectomies; miscarriage, sexual exploitation.	1) Regulation of employment 2) Frequent rest periods 3) Provision of sheds and water and mineral salts. 4) Alternate work during and after pregnancy. 5) Personal protective equipment 6) Provision of first aid facilities.
<b>Salt-kiln workers 66-67</b> (lack of personal protective equipment; working in the hot sun; unsafe working conditions)	Heat strokes; constant bleeding in the feet; injuries due to accidents.	1) Regulation of employment 2) Personal protective equipment. 3) Provision of sheds and drinking water and mineral salts.
<b>Hand-cart Pullers 68-69</b> (heavy work, even during pregnancy)	Heavy muscular exertion; thickening of the skin in the hypogastric region (lower part of abdomen); thickening of the palms; more calories spent than recovered every day; menstrual problems; repeated miscarriages.	1) Provision of better-designed hand-carts. 2) Subsidised loan facilities for investing in the improved handcart. 3) Provision of alternate work during and after pregnancy.
<b>Fuel and Fodder Gathering 70-75</b> (postural problems; long hours of walking and carrying loads)	Great physical strain and distress; postural defects, like bent backs; long hours of walking and carrying loads; pain in legs, calf muscles, shoulders and arms; thorn pricks; falls from heights; sexual harassment.	1) Provision of alternate, easily available fuel. 2) State-owned fodder farms which are easily accessible, without harassment to the women.
<b>Carrying of Water 76-77</b> (heavy physical strain, even during pregnancy)	Physical strain; intense pain in different parts of the body, especially the legs, waist, pin bones and shoulders; prolapse of the uterus; miscarriages.	1) A well-researched and properly planned scheme for the provision of clean, drinking water to every house be worked out immediately on a war-footing.
<b>Head-loaders 78-81</b> (heavy work-loads; hazardous work terrain; work during pregnancy too; sexual harassment)	Accident injuries; insect-bites; thorn-cuts and skin burns; tetanus; eye problems; lung congestion; respiratory problems; tuberculosis; high rate	1) Provision of personal protective equipment. 2) Provision of alternate work during and after pregnancy.

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<p><b>All workers involved in Manual labour</b> (lifting heavy weights; postural problems; heavy workload; continuous heavy work from childhood through illness, pregnancy and in the post-partum period to old age; nutritional deficiency).</p>	<p>of infant mortality and miscarriages; mental tension.</p> <p>Disturbances of blood circulation in the pelvic organs and lower limbs; menstrual disorders; prolapse of the uterus; miscarriage or still birth; flat and narrow pelvic, if carrying weights from early age; risk of injury to spinal column and adjacent muscles, especially in the lumbar region; circulatory organs may be affected; deformities; callousities; neuritic pains; paralysis.</p>	<p>3) Provision of medical facilities at work-sites.</p> <p>1) Provision of compulsory and free education with stipend for girls. 2) Research on ergonomics and working out good postures and training workers in these. 3) Developing of safe and efficient implements. 4) Training of doctors in Occupational Health. 5) Legislating a comprehensive act on the working conditions of workers, to include maternity benefits, leave provision, health insurance, a living wage, security of employment, and old age pension. 6) A nutritional supplements programme be introduced. 7) Availability of first aid and other health and medical services. 8) Regulation of hours of work through guaranteeing a living wage and security of regular employment. 9) Easy accessibility to drinking water and fuel fodder. 10) Education and awareness building of the women, the policy makers and the people, on the issue of women's occupation-related health problems should be initiated immediately through the mass media.</p>
<p><b>Service Sector</b> <b>Domestic Workers 82-90</b> (postural problems; working in water and with household chemical-based products)</p>	<p>Frequent colds; bruises; acid burns and other burns; chronic bodyache; postural problems; bursitis.</p>	<p>1) Free personal protective devices should be provided to protect domestic workers against harm from chemical-based products. 2) Protection in terms of wages, employment security, health provisions, paid sick leave and old age pensions should be given to them. 3) Training facilities for alternate skills should be provided.</p>
<p><b>Washer-women 91</b> (working in water; continuous use of chemical-based products)</p>	<p>Cancer, mainly of the kidneys and genitals, also of the bladder, skin and lymph tissues; irritation of the eyes</p>	<p>1) More research needed. 2) Substitution of unsafe chemicals by safer ones.</p>





Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
	and upper respiratory tract, accute chest pain; fatigue; drowsiness; memory impairment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3) Personal protective equipment should be provided, especially water-proof foot and hand protection and aprons.</li> <li>4) Hexylresorcinol aerosols should be provided in order to disinfect clothes.</li> <li>5) Regular medical watch about skin disorders.</li> </ol>
<b>Sweeper and Scavenger Women</b> 92-93 (working in the open elements and with infectious rubbish heaps)	Nausea; burns, rashes and sores on hands and feet; insect bites; viral infections; fever; headaches; body-aches; exhaustion.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Personal protective equipment must be provided against burns, rashes, sores and fumes.</li> <li>2) Alternative training facilities and alternate employment should be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Rag-pickers</b> 94 (working in the open elements and infectious rubbish piles).	Dog-bites and glass-cuts; skin diseases; virus infections like 'flue, colds and coughs headache and fainting.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) Alternative income-generation schemes and training should be provided.</li> <li>2) Effective medical facilities and protective equipments to be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Prostitutes</b> 95-104 (transmission of infections from clients, treatment by quacks)	Sexually transmitted diseases; ectopic pregnancies; backstreet abortions; miscarriages; constant pain in the abdomen; uterine and vaginal infections; leucorrhea; chronic pelvic infections; impaired fertility; sterility; irregular menstruation; possibility of giving birth to deformed and visually handicapped children; tuberculosis and other diseases like jaundice and typhoid; skin diseases like scabies; fevers; colds, coughs; asthma; anaemia; stomach ulcers; dizziness; guilt feelings; emotional deprivation; depression.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Alternative income generation schemes must be initiated for those who would like to leave this occupation.</li> <li>2) Housing schemes for prostitute should be evolved to free them from the clutches of brothel-keepers.</li> <li>3) Descriminalisation of prostitution, without legalising it should be legislated.</li> <li>4) Awareness-building among the workers about the possibility of occupational diseases.</li> </ol>
<b>Health Personnel</b> 105 (transmission of infections from patients; Government coercion)	Infections and contagious diseases, especially tuberculosis and jaundice; sexual harassment; mental tension (due to pressure for completing family planning targets from the Government).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.) Implementation of ILO Recommendations (Recommendation No. 157, Convention No. 149). Some of these are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— regular medical examinations</li> <li>— more research on specific risks</li> <li>— personal protective equipment</li> <li>— longer annual holidays</li> <li>— compensation</li> </ul> </li> <li>2) Hours of work should be regulated</li> <li>3) Provision of safe housing.</li> </ol>

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<b>Masala-pounding Workers</b> 106 (repeated lifting of arms interchangeably while pounding; constant friction of the hand; skin irritation and irritation of mucous membranes due to the masala)	Back pain; body ache; chest pain; headache, pain in arms and legs; pain in shoulder joints; coughing; sneezing; abdominal pain; burning sensations (especially in hands); blisters and callouses; eye problems; burning sensation while urinating; white vaginal discharge; dizziness and exhaustion.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Regular free medical check-ups and treatment are necessary.</li> <li>2) Training facilities for alternative employment should be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Vendors</b> 107-116 (working in the open; walking long distances; carrying weights; harassment by police and licensing authorities)	Coughs, colds, fever, eye complaints, constant headaches, pain in hands and shoulders stiffness in hands and hips, backaches, extreme fatigue, mental tension.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Women vendors should be given protective devices for their hands, feet and head, including lighter load-carrying devices, like, folding wheel barrows.</li> <li>2) They should have the right to free movement in the country and licenses should be issued to any woman who wants to vend her wares.</li> <li>3) All necessary steps must be taken to stop harassment, intimidation, extortion by police and other officials and authorities.</li> <li>4) Protected vending places should be built at locations convenient to both the consumers and the vendors.</li> </ol>
<b>All Women Workers in the Service Sector</b> (Uncovered body parts in contact with water for long periods of time; contact with dirt infected by microbes, viruses; exposure to hazardous chemicals and the elements; transmission of infections from other people, due to close contact; lifting of heavy weights frequently; postural problems; accidents; low nutritional status; lack of facilities like toilets, drinking water, rest rooms, low wages and insecurity of employment)	Chronic body aches; chills; cold; bursitis; cancer of kidneys and skin; respiratory problems; insect bites; infectious and contagious diseases; skin diseases; burning sensations in hands, and abdomen; eye problems; injuries to feet hands and palms; sexual harassment and abuse; harassment by officials and the police.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Regulation of hours of work through a living wage is necessary.</li> <li>2) Provision of personal protective equipment for work, where body parts in constant contact with water and where heavy loads are carried.</li> <li>3) Unsafe chemicals to be substituted.</li> <li>4) Provision of training and alternate employment.</li> <li>5) Provision of powerful, local exhausts.</li> <li>6) Medical monitoring and free good medical treatment.</li> <li>7) Doctors trained in Occupational Health to be provided in comprehensive medical scheme including maternity benefits.</li> <li>8) Strict regulation of the powers of officials; stopping police harassment of prostitutes, ragpickers and vendors.</li> <li>9) Education and awareness-building of the women workers, the</li> </ol>

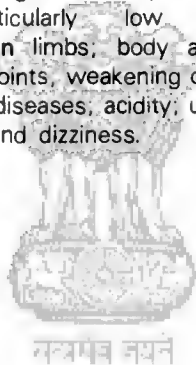
Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<p><b>Home Based House-workers 117-121</b> (Exposure to dust, fumes, fuel smoke, chemicals in household products; possibility of accidents; heavy work load; drudgery; postural problems; mental tension)</p>	<p>Cough and expectoration; bronchitis; emphysema; irritation of eyes, nose and throat; skin wounds, skin reactions; eye diseases; physical pain; exhaustion; anaemia; hastening of tumour; carbon monoxide toxicity; impaired foetal development; severe depression; low self-esteem.</p>	<p>policy-makers and the people, on the issue of women's occupation related health problems should be initiated immediately through the mass media.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Hours of work should be regulated</li> <li>2) More research in and easy availability of safe cooking fuel e.g. LPG Cylinders.</li> <li>3) Availability of and education about better abrasive cleaners;</li> <li>4) Provision of personal protective equipments;</li> <li>5) Sharing of work by others including men in the household;</li> <li>6) Provision of community kitchens, community child-care and laundries.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Beedi-workers 122-134</b> (postural problems; exposure to tobacco dust and nicotine; cuts due to injury; repetitive movements constant friction on fingers).</p>	<p>Neck and low back pain; pain in hands and fingers; abdominal pain; burning sensation in the throat; cough; chronic bronchitis; asthma; palpitation; bodyache; eye problems giddiness; effect of nicotine on reproductive functions; amenorrhoea; leucorrhoea; general fatigue; anaemia.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Lessening of work loads through a regular fixation of wage-rates</li> <li>2) Reduction in dust levels</li> <li>3) Development of suitable implements to avoid postural problems</li> <li>4) Regular medical check-ups and treatment.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Chikan workers 135-137</b> (postural problems; allergies; low nutritional levels; continuous strain on eyes and working in ill-ventilated and badly lighted atmosphere)</p>	<p>Back-aches; spondylitis; fatigue; failing eye-sight; tuberculosis; lung function disorders; allergic effects; Vitamin-D deficiency; goitre.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Development of appropriate implements to avoid postural problems.</li> <li>2) Regular eye check-ups and provision of free spectacles.</li> <li>3) Programme to provide iodised salt and Vitamin-D.</li> <li>4) Provision of a living wage.</li> <li>5) Provision of alternate employment</li> </ol>
<p><b>Lace-workers 138-139</b> (postural problems; repetitive movements continuous eye strain and working in ill-ventilated and badly lighted rooms.</p>	<p>Headaches, low back pain; finger aches, muscle-pain; eye problems.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Provision of frequent rest periods.</li> <li>2) Provision of a living wage and regular employment.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Agarbatti-workers 140-142</b> (postural problems; reaction to chemicals and non-availability of personal protective equipments)</p>	<p>Low back pain, pain in hands, palms, and fingers; contact dermatitis; skin abrasions.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Research on and provision of substitute, safe work-materials.</li> <li>2) Provision of personal protective equipments.</li> <li>3) Provision of a living wage and regular employment.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Paper-bag makers 143</b> (Postural factors and lack of</p>	<p>Bodyaches; constant pain in the back,</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Training in good postures.</li> </ol>

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
personel protective equipments for hands and fingers, repetitive uncreative work)	shoulders and waist; backs grow bent; stiffness in joints; hardening and cracking of skin; deep cracks along fingers; discolouring and itching of fingers; eyes pain and water tuberculosis; lack of Vitamin-D constant acidity; heart disease dulling of the mind.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2) Provision of personal protective equipments for hands.</li> <li>3) Provision of regular employment or alternate employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Zari and Zardosi Workers</b> (postural factors; long hours of work; fine, minute work in ill-lighted rooms)	144 Weakening of eye-sight; chronically hunched backs; aching in hands and fingers; legs ache; chronic head-aches body aches.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Research into and development of ergonomically correct tools is necessary.</li> <li>2) Postural training should be initiated through worker's education boards.</li> <li>3) Reduction in workloads through better wage-rates.</li> <li>4) Facilities like proper lighting at the work place i.e. at home should be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Carpet weavers</b> (postural factors; long hours of minute work)	145 Eye problems; pain in joints	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Postural training and facilities like proper lighting should be provided.</li> <li>2) Reduction in workloads through better wage-rates.</li> </ol>
<b>Weavers</b> (postural problems, and badly-lighted rooms)	146 Backaches; eye problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Facilities like proper lighting and postural training. Also development of ergonomically correct tools.</li> <li>2) Reduction in workloads through the guarantee of a living wage.</li> </ol>
<b>Papad-workers</b> (excessive workloads; postural problems; lack of facilities at home)	Pain in the chest, shoulders, legs and hands (personal communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Reduction in workloads can be achieved through an increase in wage-rates, as well as regulation of hours of work.</li> <li>2) Periodic rest intervals during work.</li> </ol>
<b>Block Printers</b> (repetitive movement of banging the block; constant contact with the chemical dye; postural aspects)	Tuberculosis; chest pain; difficulty in breathing; roughening of fingers; hardening of palms; aching and numbing of fingers; hurting of hands; skin irritation and itching; giddiness; miscarriages. (Personal conversations)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Workloads should be reduced through guaranteeing a living wage.</li> <li>2) Personal protective equipment should be provided</li> <li>3) Alternate employment should be provided</li> <li>4) Pregnant women should be given paid leave or provided with alternate employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Tagai-workers</b> (postural problems; minute stitching work; low nutritional level)	Aching of feet and low back pain; eye pains and weakening eye-sight; extreme fatigue and weakness. (Personal conversations)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Regular and free medical check-ups, especially eye check-ups should be undertaken. Spectacles</li> </ol>

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
		<p>should be provided free.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2) Facilities like proper lighting should be provided.</li> <li>3) Workloads should be reduced by providing the women with a living wage.</li> <li>4) Women workers should be provided with postural training.</li> </ol>
<b>Gunny-bag Stitching Workers</b> (constant exposure to and inhalation of cement dust; postural problems; low nutritional level)	Weakening eye-sight; headaches; backaches; feet aches, fever, asthma; breathing problems; intermittent, shallow cough; tuberculosis; loss of appetite, extreme fatigue). (Personal conversations)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Powerful local exhausts.</li> <li>2) Regular medical check-ups and treatment, especially for respiratory problems.</li> <li>3) Provision of nutritional supplements</li> <li>4) Provision of training and alternate employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Chindi-workers</b> (exposure to dust; heavy workload; low nutritional status)	Chronic cough; hurting and watering of eyes; headaches; giddiness; blanking out; severe pain in the lower abdomen; scanty periods with clots and other menstrual irregularities; exhaustion. (Personal communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Powerful local exhausts.</li> <li>2) Regular medical check-ups and treatment, especially for respiratory and gynaecological problems.</li> <li>3) Provision of nutritional supplements.</li> </ol>
<b>Tie-and-Dye workers.</b> (Postural problems; cuts due to the metal contraption used; excessive workload)	Constant cuts and dents in fingers; paining of the fingers and arms; eye pain, back aches, especially low back pain; severe pains in the abdomen. (Personal communication).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Research on and development of tools and implements which are ergonomically more scientific.</li> <li>2) Postural training should be given to the workers.</li> <li>3) Personal protective equipment should be provided especially for the fingers.</li> <li>4) Hours of work should be reduced through guaranteeing a living wage and security of employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Shoe-embroidery workers</b> (postural problems; minute eye-straining work)	Back-pain especially low back pain; eye problems; extreme fatigue. (Personal communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Postural training should be given to the workers.</li> <li>2) Facilities like proper lighting of homes.</li> <li>3) Hours of work should be reduced, through guaranteeing a living wage and security of employment.</li> <li>4) Provision of personal protective equipment for palms and fingers.</li> </ol>
<b>Bead piercing workers and Bangle workers</b> (postural problems; minute work)	Back pain; weakening of eyesight. (Personal Communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Research and development of ergonomically better tools and implements.</li> </ol>

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
		2) Postural training should be given to workers. 3) Facilities like proper lighting should be provided in their homes at subsidised rates). 4) Regular medical check-ups and treatment. 5) Provision of training and alternative employment.
<b>Charkha-spinners</b> (Constant use of shoulders, arm and fingers for pulling the thread; postural problems)	Aches in shoulders and upper right arm; back aches; finger aches; respiratory problems. (Personal communication)	1) Levels of rotten dust, and fibres in the atmosphere need to be monitored (monitored) and controlled. 2) Workloads should be reduced through a guarantee of a living wage, security of employment and facilities at the work-site i.e., at home.
<b>Tailoring workers</b> (postural problems; heavy work on the machines)	Low back pain; leg pains; eye problems (Personal conversations)	1) Regular eye check-ups and development of machines heights to suit women's height.
<b>Ready-made Garments Workers</b> 147-148 (postural problems; heavy workload)	Postural problems-back, especially low back pain, eye problems; anaemia; leucorrhea, urinary tract infections	1) Necessity of reduction in workloads through guaranteeing a living wage. 2) Proper facilities like lighting, ventilation should be provided. 3) Research and development of machines to suit the height of women.
<b>Brass-ware workers</b> 149 (Hot atmosphere; accident prone work)	Respiratory disease; eye problems; heat exhaustion; accidents.	1) Regulating work on the guidelines given in the encyclopaedia by the ILO for hot work. 2) Regular check-ups and treatment for respiratory problems.
<b>Basket-weavers</b> 150 (handling rough sharp-edge surfaces)	Bleeding of hands; pain, in lower back	1) Provision of personal protective equipment. 2) Provision of a living wage as well as alternate employment.
<b>Pottery-painters</b> 151 (exposure to lead)	Lead poisoning	1) It is necessary to control exposure to lead and to substitute the presently used unsafe chemicals by safe ones.
<b>Supari-cutters</b> (Postural problems)	Aching of hands and shoulders	1) Research on and development of alternate proper instruments. 2) Reduction in workloads through guaranteeing a living wage.

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<b>Workers Ignoring Clothes</b> 153 (Excessive workloads)	Pains in hands and shoulders. (Personal communication)	1) It is necessary to reduce the workloads through guaranteeing a living wage. 2) It is necessary to monitor workplaces for levels of allergens and control of allergens at workplaces.
Knitting workers (Exposure to allergens)	Asthma	1) It is necessary to monitor workplaces for levels of allergens and control of allergens at workplaces.
<b>Reed workers</b> 154 (handling rough sharp edged material)	Cutting and bleeding of palms and fingers; back aches.	1) Personal protective equipment should be provided to the workers. 2) First aid facilities should be provided at the work-sites.
<b>All women workers working in home-based occupations</b> (Exposure to dusts, such as tobacco, cement, house-dust, exposure to hazardous chemicals, carbon monoxide, lead, abrasive cleaners, fungi; drudgery; repeated movements of a few parts of the body; heavy workload; postural problems without respite; constant strain on eyes due to poor lighting; low nutritional status and work valued less in money terms as well as in terms of status)	Respiratory problems; hastening of tumours; digestive problems; adverse effect on reproductive systems; fatigue; skin problems; back, particularly low back pain; pain in limbs, body aches; stiffness of joints, weakening of eye sight; heart diseases, acidity, ulcers, exhaustion and dizziness.	1) Research on and development of hazard free cooking facilities like smokeless chulhas, bio-gas or LPG gas stoves. These should be widely distributed. 2) Regulation of working hours of the workers through: (a) guaranteeing a living wage. (b) security of employment. (c) leave and holiday provisions. 3) The workers should be further protected by means of legislation and ensuring that they receive: (a) maternity benefits and ante-natal care. (c) creche and anganwadi facilities. ((c) basic facilities like drinking water, electricity, toilets. (d) old age pensions. 4) Workers should be provided with work space near the home and credit facilities for production shelters. Housing norms should provide for work-space needs 5) Personal protective equipment should be provided to the workers. 6) Postural training and other preventive health education should be initiated through the Workers Education Board. 7) Research on ergonomic aspect of homebased production should be initiated immediately through National Research and Design



Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
		Institutes, with a view to suggest possible modifications in the work posture and process, and to develop simple, inexpensive preventive and protective equipment. This should be done in consultation with workers.
		8) Women workers should be provided with nutritious food supplements.
		9) Education and raising of awareness of the women workers, the policy-makers and the people, should be undertaken through the mass media. This should include.
		(a) the sort of work women do;
		(b) the health related and specific health problems they face
		(c) the reasons for these problems
		(d) the various possible solutions to reduce and stop these.
<b>Processing Workers</b>		
<b>Fish-processing 155-158</b> (Working in ice-water; heavy seasonal work; fluctuations in work quantum; injuries due to handling fish)	Extreme fatigue; backache; leg pain; chest congestion; peeling of skin, skin infections; numbing of fingers; scratching, blistering and bleeding of hands; burning and stinging pains in hands.	1) It is necessary to provide the workers with the necessary personal protective equipment. 2) The workers should be able to take frequent rest periods during work. 3) Guarantee of a living wage, continuous employment and facilities at work-sites.
<b>Cashew workers 159-161</b> (constant contact with corrosive, black fluid; hard nut splitting; postural problems)	Burning and corroding of hands; allergy; dermatitis; hand-injuries; boils and abscesses on hands; severe respiratory problems; back pain due to crouching position	1) Personal protective devices which do not hinder the free and fast movements of the hands and are comfortable e.g. gloves. 2) Timely treatment of skin problems. 3) Guarantee of a living wage, regular employment and facilities at work site.
<b>Coir-workers 162-165</b> (sitting on wet ground; unprotected hands; exposure to coir dust; lack of early detection of elephantitis)	Respiratory and cardiovascular complaints; asthma; cough; expectoration; dysnoea; precordial pain; palpitation; haemoptysis; skin diseases; elephantiasis; leprosy; hyperkeratosis; neurological disorders	1) Local exhausts should be provided. 2) Regular medical check-ups and treatment, especially for respiratory problems, and diseases like elephantiasis are necessary. 3) Workloads should be reduced through a living wage, security of employment and facilities at work-site.



Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<b>Coir Yarn spinners</b> (handling rough surfaces)	Hand injuries—linear abrasions of the skin of the palm; pain and bleeding of injuries. (Personal communication)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Personal protective equipment, especially for hands and palms should be provided.</li> <li>2) Living wages, regular employment, medical facilities and old-age pensions.</li> </ol>
<b>Wool workers</b> 166 (exposure to dust and fibres)	Respiratory allergies like allergic rhinitis and allergic bronchitis; pulmonary tuberculosis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Personal protective equipment should be provided.</li> <li>2) Regular medical check-ups and treatment for respiratory problems should be provided.</li> <li>3) Living wages and security of employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Glass workers</b> 167 (extremely hot atmosphere; cuts due to glass splinters)	Extreme thermal stress; cuts and burn injuries sometimes requiring stitches;	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Workers should be provided with clean drinking water and mineral salts.</li> <li>2) Frequent rest periods and personal protective equipment should be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Pottery workers</b> 168 (continuous exposure to silica dust)	Fibrosis of lungs; silicosis; tuberculosis:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Regulation of hours of work through a living wage and regular employment.</li> <li>2) Powerful local exhausts should be provided.</li> <li>3) There should be monitoring of the workplace for the extent of dust present and the size of dust.</li> <li>4) Regular medical check-up and treatment for lung problems should be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Garment workers</b> 169 (Postural problems; eye-straining work; repetitive movements; lack of facilities, like toilets)	Pain in arms and legs; back pain, especially low back pain; swelling in limbs; pain in the neck and abdomen; persistent muscular pain; headaches; fever; eye problems; eye strain; visual fatigue; dizziness; exhaustion; insomnia finger injuries; leucorrhea; burning and itching sensation while urinating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Provision of the necessary facilities at the work place—toilets, drinking water, medical check-ups, holidays, regulation of work hours, should be made compulsory.</li> <li>2) Regular eye check-ups and providing free spectacles.</li> <li>3) Proper lighting and ventilation.</li> <li>4) Development of appropriate instruments to avoid postural problems.</li> <li>5) Living wages and regular employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Electronics workers</b> 170-171 (handling small, numerous parts; exposure to hazardous chemicals; drudgery; postural problems)	Eye problems; tuberculosis; pneumonia; stomach problems like ulcers; fatigue; loss of appetite; skin diseases; frequent sore throats; cold; backaches; insomnia; depression; anxiety.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Rotation of work, proper lighting, regular medical check-ups, especially eye check-ups should be provided.</li> <li>2) Security of employment and living wage.</li> </ol>

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<b>Slate-pencil workers</b> 172-173 (Exposure to fine silica dust)	Dry cough; cough with expectoration; breathlessness, haemoptysis; chest pain; weight loss; fibrosis of lungs; irritation of bronchial mucosa, silicosis; clubbing of fingers; diminished chest movements; crepitations; rhonchi; early deaths.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Powerful local exhaust should be provided.</li> <li>2) Regular medical check-ups and treatment for respiratory problems should be provided.</li> <li>3) Training for and employment in alternative jobs should be initiated.</li> <li>4) Schemes for young children should be initiated whereby compulsory, free education with a substantial stipend be made available to them.</li> <li>5) Regulation of hours of work through guaranteeing a living wage.</li> </ol>
<b>Matches and Fireworks workers</b> 174-175	Chemical toxicity; explosive accidents; dermatitis; back-aches.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) It is necessary to monitor the work sites to avoid explosions.</li> <li>2) Regular monitoring for levels of chemicals should be provided.</li> <li>3) Safer chemicals should be substituted instead of the present unsafe ones.</li> <li>4) Children should be given a substantial stipend to continue education and vocational training.</li> </ol>
<b>Workers in Beedi Tobacco Processing</b> 176 (exposure to nicotine and tobacco dust)	Nausea; giddiness; vomiting; headache; tiredness; loss of appetite; weaknesses.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) It is necessary to monitor the levels of tobacco dust and use powerful exhausts to get rid of these.</li> <li>2) The workers should be provided with personal protective equipment.</li> <li>3) A living wage and regular employment are necessary.</li> <li>4) For workers who are allergic to the fumes, alternate employment should be provided.</li> </ol>
<b>Small-scale pharmaceutical workers</b> 178-180 (heavy workload; exposure to chemicals; postural problems)	Extreme fatigue; weakness; back-aches; aching of arms, feet and shoulders; eyestrain; low resistance to the effects of the chemicals they handle.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Workloads need to be reduced.</li> <li>2) Work-systems like rotation of jobs, need to be worked out, to avoid eye strain.</li> </ol>

Occupation and some Causal Factors	Health Problems	Recommendations
<p><b>Workers involved in Processing and other industries</b></p> <p>(body exposed to ice-cold water; corrosive fluids; wet grounds; constant exposure to dusts, such as, silica, fibres, allergens; infections due to work; repetitive, monotonous work; drudgery; eye strain; injuries due to sharp-edged, rough surfaces; postural problems; contact with extremely hazardous and explosive chemicals; lack of facilities like toilets, drinking water, rest rooms; low wages and insecurity of employment; low nutritional status.</p>	<p>Extreme fatigue; pain in body; corrosion of hands and feet; peeling of the skin; silicosis and other incurable and fatal respiratory problems such as fibrosis; clubbing of fingers; serious injuries; skin diseases like dermatitis; elephantiasis; backaches; allergies; weakening of eyesight.</p>	<p>3) Postural training needs to be initiated.</p> <p>4) Levels of chemicals in the air, need to be controlled.</p> <p>1) Protective equipment should be provided to workers to protect them from hazardous chemicals constant exposure to water and dusts.</p> <p>2) Dust and fibre levels at the work place should be mentioned.</p> <p>3) Strict supervision to prevent accidents is necessary.</p> <p>4) Workers should be given frequent rest periods. This should be made legally obligatory.</p> <p>5) Proper facilities at the worksites should be made obligatory, e.g., proper lighting;.</p> <p>6) A medical scheme should be evolved for workers which includes, among other things: regular medical check-ups and treatment, training of especially women doctors in Occupational Health issues, maternity benefits, regular rest periods, leave and holidays.</p> <p>7) Regulation of hours of work through a living wage, employment security and old age pensions.</p> <p>8) Women workers should be provided with nutritious food supplements.</p> <p>9) Education and raising of awareness of the women workers, the policy-makers and the people, should be undertaken, through the mass media. This should include:.</p> <p>(a) the type of work women do.</p> <p>(b) the health-related and specific health problems they face.</p> <p>(c) the reasons or causes for these problems.</p> <p>(d) the various possible solutions to reduce and stop these.</p>



### General Aspects of Pyphysical Health

35. The most common occupational hazard for all women, is, probably overwork. Though it is generally thought that the man is responsible for farm work assisted by the woman, in most

cases, it is the woman who does the farm work assisted by the man.<sup>181</sup>

36. A study of labour in both homes and fields in Haryana, by Shanti Chakravorty, has for instance revealed that the average working day for women was between 15<sup>1/2</sup> to 16 hours. This was also found to be true in many other studies.

37. This is true for almost all women in India. However, over-working tends to take place in a situation which has further grave implications for the health of women. The health status of women in India, as indicated by demographic statistics, is a matter of serious concern. The higher mortality rate is only one of the many indicators of her poor health status and poor access to health care facilities.

38. An important underlying reason for the poor health of women, especially among the poor, labouring women, is the malnutrition from which they suffer right from birth to death.

### Nutrition

39. The nutritional status of women has shown no improvement and, if anything, seems to have deteriorated over the last few years, perhaps, at a faster pace than the rest of the population. The per capita calorie intake in the country as a whole declined from 2,445 in 1961 to 2,170 in 1971 (NSS estimates). The worst sufferers, paradoxically, are the agricultural labourers, people living in slums, in drought affected areas and in remote tribal areas, but among all these people, the axe has fallen mostly on women.<sup>182</sup>

40. Malnutrition in women has further been aggravated by repeated pregnancies and lactation. It is stated that the average Indian woman becomes pregnant eight times and gives birth to 6-7 children of whom, 4-6 children survive. The infant is breast fed for at least 2 years or until the arrival of the next child. Therefore, out of 30 years of reproductive life, she spends 16 years in pregnancy and lactation.<sup>183</sup>

41. Due to chronic malnutrition, women have no energy reserves for emergencies, and hence, fall ill, or at least feel ill, more often. Also their mortality rates are higher in the event of an epidemic. This could also result in early wearing out of cells and, hence, early ageing. In India, about 60 to 80 per cent of women suffer from varied degrees of anaemia. In fact, it has been estimated that 10 to 20 per cent of all maternal deaths are due to nutritional anaemia. Women do not receive the additional nutritional requirement, so essential during pregnancy and lactation. For instance, during pregnancy, while it is recommended that she gets at least 2,500 calories, in fact, she receives only 1,440 calories. She needs 55 gms. protein, but gets only 37 gms. She needs 40mgm. of iron but receives only 18 mgm.<sup>184</sup> She needs 1 gm of calcium but receives a mere 0.2 gm. The differences between what is needed and what she actually gets, are even more marked during the period of lactation.

42. Iron deficiency anaemia also results in constant tiredness, causing blackouts, general disinterest in work and lower resistance to infections. It is an entirely preventable problem.<sup>185</sup>

43. The morbid effects of malnutrition are well documented, like toxemia of pregnancy, post partum haemorrhage and now, malnutrition is suspected to cause psychiatric problems in women, lower resistance to fatigue, affecting working capacity under conditions of stress and increasing susceptibility to many other diseases. Maternal malnutrition also influences reproductive performance, affecting pelvic size, birth weight of child, lactation and breast feeding.

44. Besides these, there are a considerable number of problems that women, especially poor, labouring women, suffer from. These are menstrual and menopausal problems, dysmenorrhoea, white discharge, uterine bleeding, back pain and migraines.

45. There are also other social conditions which affect women's health which are reflected in statistics like the low sex-ratio in the country; high infant mortality, female infanticide and

female foeticide, neglect of and discrimination against girls, early marriage and child-bearing, high maternal mortality, hard work, low levels of education, problems relating to reproduction and contraception.

#### General Aspects of Mental Health and Social Exploitation

46. "Occupational health should aim at the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all Occupation..." Definition of occupational Health by the joint ILO-WHO Committee.

47. An important aspect of a woman's mental health is the feeling of security or insecurity vis-a-vis her own being. The very unorganised nature of the "informal sector" and the women working in it, exposes them to various forms of oppression, including sexual oppression. The forms of sexual oppression experienced by the women are numerous: they vary from rape, forced prostitution and sexual harassment to wife-beating, job insecurity, the sexual division of labour at home and at work and restrictions on the freedom to move around as they please. On the other hand, women face the cruel side of "freedom" contraceptives, which are dangerous and yet under experimentation, repeated abortions, all dumped on them.

48. Women workers suffer a peculiar form of oppression on the work-site, in the home, and in society at large—sexual harassment. Most women also experience active or passive discrimination at the work-site. They are given the least skilled, the most monotonous and often the more hazardous jobs, as well as, often being paid less than men for the same or similar work. Certain operations in agriculture like weeding are "reserved" for women. This operation involves constantly bending for all the eight hours that women work. They are also paid less. In the beedi industry, men often work in factories and women at home, doing the same work and getting very different wages and benefits. In the electronics industry, men often work in factories and women at home, doing the same work and getting very different wages and benefits. In the electronics industry, women do the assembly work and men do the supervision.

49. At home, women are kept in a subordinate position, denied any decisive say in family matters, and often beaten, or otherwise ill-treated. Women are the last priority even in the family, the last to eat and the last to get medical treatment. Even when they work outside and are economically productive, the work at home is her responsibility alone—from getting water from long distances to fodder gathering, to household chores. Besides this social productivity, the entire responsibility of reproduction and child-rearing is on women. This is also true about contraception.

50. Another aspect of harassment that almost all women talk about is the harassment at home due to drunkard husbands. As a *pheriwalli* in Bombay said "When my husband died, I felt I was better off. Even if I eat dry bread, at least I eat it in peace. What did I get from marriage, but scoldings and beatings?" Women vendors in Madras had a similar experience. A fruit vendor in Madras said, "At night, I bear the brunt of a different harassment"<sup>186</sup>.

51. Other types of harassment that women workers in the informal sector have to put up with are the contradictory expectations from her different roles. They are often the major, if not the sole-supporters of the family. But their role as home-maker and a mother is expected to be fulfilled just as well. Besides, the strain of the entire workload and responsibility, is the constant feeling of guilt, generated by having to share herself between home and work demands, which gradually becomes a part of the personality of women. If a child is ill, if there's not enough food or money, or any child is hurt, it is somehow the woman's responsibility, her blame and her guilt.

52. Similarly, there is the idea of female seclusion in its various forms and degrees and there

is also the pressure on women to perform as workers, as housewives, as mothers. There is an implicit demand that women workers be superhuman beings, but not show it, because then it becomes threatening to the male ego. And that too is dealt with in this society, by punishing women. Even as late as 1982, there have been instances in Bihar and Maharashtra,<sup>187</sup> where women have been branded as witches and killed, burnt or stoned publicly.

53. The pressures that women workers have to live under, the stress and strain of the entire situation, have physical repercussions, as well as an impact on their entire emotional, psychological ability to cope with their lives.

#### Technology and Women's Health

54. The impact of technology on women has been in two basic ways:

- 1) By displacing women's labour
- 2) By increasing women's burdens and socio-economic vulnerability

55. Technology has the potential to affect women's health both positively and negatively and both directly and indirectly. Studies in 'developed' or 'boom' areas of the country show that the health and nutritional status of a woman has actually deteriorated, and the incidence of low-birth-weight babies and neo-natal mortality has increased. This results in an under-nourished, over-worked, and unhealthy woman, unprotected by any labour laws or social security.

56. There are also a number of cases where the introduction of new technological processes themselves harm women's health. Industries like electronics, pharmaceutical, matches, slate-pencils, indicate these hazards which result in serious health problems – respiratory, eye problems, postural complaints, skin irritations and premature deaths. Such direct effects on health are largely due to the fact that technologies have been developed for productivity and profit, with workers' safety, posture and overall health not entering the process of decision-making. And with avenues of employment being so limited for women, they are unable to organise or demand safety measures, even when they are well aware of the impact of their work on their health.

57. Ironically, several medical technologies, ostensibly evolved for improving the health of the people, and particularly of women, have created precisely the opposite effect. The best example of this, is in the area of contraceptive technology. With the Government obsession about population increase, the entire burden and responsibility of birth control has been placed on women, and specifically on poor women. However, the contraceptive techniques thrust upon the women have two invariable adjuncts.

1. They are technologies which are outside women's control, requiring trained professionals to install them or provide follow-up e.g. IUDs, tubal ligation, injectable contraceptives, laproscopic tubectomies.

2. They are technologies which can be hazardous to women's health at two levels; (a) either because the technology itself has side effects (as is the case with injectables and intra-uterine devices like the loop and the copper-T or because (b) to be safe the technology has to be applied by highly-trained and experienced hands, and within an environment where sterile conditions and adequate aftercare are scrupulously maintained. Under the present conditions, where mass laproscopy camps, with inadequately trained doctors and unhygienic conditions are the order of the day, such technologies place women at an even greater risk.

58. Women suffer from serious health problems – excessive bleeding, cramps, backaches, headaches, dizziness and swellings after IUD insertions, laproscopic sterilization and most of all, injectable contraceptives like Net-En and Depo-Provera.

59. Amniocentesis-cum-abortion clinics are proliferating all over our country, without let or

hindrance from either Government or Medical bodies. Ill-equipped and poorly trained doctors and technicians are performing this test, which requires a high order of skill, on thousands of women; with disastrous results in many cases: rupturing of the amniotic sac, and deaths from anaphylathic shock or haemorrhage are some of the known consequences. Preying on the socially-enforced desperation for a male child, these clinics also perform abortions on women at dangerously advanced stages of pregnancy, with inevitable results on their health, and sometimes on their lives.

60. These are only some of the most serious and widespread problems created by so-called health technologies. Far from improving or preserving the fragile health status of women, they often actively endanger it. Therefore, the whole question of technology and women's health, must be seriously re-examined in this context, particularly where the technology is not within women's control or where it facilitates the existing negative attitudes to women or promotes male-domination.

61. Another area for concern and action is related to the lack of technology and the consequences for women's health. Examples of this are numerous. The absence of simple technologies, for domestic fuel for cooking and heating, for implements and tools which will reduce the drudgery, energy-intensiveness and health hazards of women's work, is a major lacuna.

62. The problems here are of three kinds: (i) Where technologies have been developed, but have not reached the majority of poor women for structural, administrative, or other reasons. The smokeless chula is an excellent illustration of this. (ii) Where no technologies have been developed for easing or facilitating women's work because the latter is itself a low priority in research and development. For instance, simple tools, implements or protective devices can be developed and distributed to women working in coir-yarn spinning, rope-making, tie-and-dye, beedi-rolling, transplanting rice and shelling prawns. These could be cheap, simply designed, mass-produced by other women, and save them from untold miseries and illnesses. The fact that little or nothing is, in fact, available, in a nation capable of space satellites and nuclear power, speaks eloquently of the low value placed on women's labour and health; (iii) Where technologies have been developed but are inappropriate or unviable for poor women because they have not been consulted or involved in the planning, development, and prototype-testing phases. Several illustrations can be given, but the coiryarn spindle and solar cooker best symbolise the problem.

63. From the above, it is obvious that the basic concerns and, hence, the direction of technological changes and advances, needs to be reversed. Designing and development of basic tools for easing women's efforts, not dispensing with labour, and improving their health status, are an urgent priority—bio-gas installation, tools, implements and protective devices, together with subsidies and/or loan facilities for women to be able to avail themselves of these, is urgent.

## **Recommendations**

### **Integrated Approach to Health**

64. While making recommendations for the future relating to the health of women in the informal sector, it is necessary to outline the existing situation in terms of women, work and health very explicitly.

65. The larger situation is one of invisibility of women's labour, devaluation of women's labour, non-recognition of women as human beings, and of their role in social labour and social production. It is also a situation where the basic sexual division of labour is not merely an important aspect of the relationships within the family, but has become a structural aspect of

the labour-market and of the wage structure. It is a situation where even the most basic national priorities do not feature in women's health and work positively. If there has been any emphasis, it is mainly on the reproductive and maternal roles in the usual Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programmes, but this too has been extremely minimal. It is an atmosphere which is both class biased as well as sex-biased, grinding down poor, labouring women in all aspects of their life. These aspects of the situation today have serious implications for women:

1. Women's work, unrecognised, devalued and constricted by the sexual division of labour, consists of economically productive labour, socially productive labour and reproductive labour. Even when women are not employed, they are involved in socially productive and reproductive labour, all of which is absolutely necessary for the continuation and reproduction of society.

Precisely due to this, most women are not, and cannot be involved in a single occupation all their lives. Very few women, as opposed to the majority of men, can be said to be employed or working in one sector of work all their working lives, except for housework and child-bearing and rearing.

2. Most of the problems, especially the health problems that women face, are related to their general life situation. These aggravate the problems women face in their work situation as workers. These general problems include nutrition, accessibility to health services, water, housing, sanitation, maternity benefits, and child-care, control over their own bodies, opportunities for education and training, their status within the family, as well as situations that affect their mental and emotional health, that is, economic and job insecurity and helplessness due to harassment and discrimination.

It is necessary to tackle these together with the health problems women face directly related to their work. This is extremely important because it is not accidental that certain sections of women work in the informal sector of the economy. Working in the informal sector is a part of a self-perpetuating vicious circle, which requires much more than small-scale temporary palliatives to see that the women are able not only to survive, but to leave it once for all. This vicious circle consists of the following cycle: women working in the informal sector, hence poor women, hence, living in unhealthy conditions in bastis, hence, less nutritious food leading to ill health, hence, also, less opportunities for education and training, and thus being compelled to work in the informal sector.

3. The work that women do, and the conditions in which women do it, constitute the lowest stratum of society. Women workers in the informal sector constitute a subproletariat. Thus, the nature of work, the security of employment, the wages, the conditions of work, are extremely exploitative and give rise to a number of health problems for the women workers. And because of the informal nature of their work, no mechanisms of redressing their grievances and health problems have been evolved.

66. Problems relating to the work of the women workers in the informal sector are: low wages, insecurity of employment and seasonal employment, long hours of work, no provisions for leave or holidays, no maternity protection, no health provisions or schemes, no insurance or old age benefits.

67. Most of the health problems that the women workers in the informal sector face, relate to the complexities of their lives and the deeper social mechanisms and structures underlying their situation. This complex situation, therefore, demands a multi-faceted approach. The basic aspects of this approach may be summed up broadly as:

68. It is not sufficient to provide health needs, without at the same time, attacking these underlying structural factors of exploitation and lopsided control of resources, which result in



the cycle of poverty, underemployment and unemployment, pushing large numbers of the rural and urban poor in the informal sector which, perforce, only permit very marginal levels of living. Health is no longer seen as a service without an integrated approach to the community and its problems. Similarly, packaging health services for women in the informal sector, without, at the same time, affecting their levels of living, including a living wage, improved conditions of work, a safe and hazard-free work-place as well as protective equipment, controlled hours, benefits such as for health, maternity, creches and old-age pensions, sanitation, housing and potable water, near to their home in quantities necessary for family health, will be a purposeless exercise. Health must be understood in the context of this total scenario to affect the conditions of women in the informal sector.

69. We make the following suggestions with regard to women, health and work.

#### General physical health needs

1. Nutritious and sufficient food is a crying need of the women workers in the informal sector. *Specific nutritional programmes which include calcium, proteins iron and, Vitamin-D, could be initiated through the government health care system.*

*A nation-wide programme for the distribution of nutritious, subsidised food supplements which includes calcium for women should be organised, on the lines of a similar programme of milk and egg powder in the 1950's.* Coarse grains like ragi, as well as milk be made widely available at subsidised rates. Since all women in poverty work to eke out a living, they should be the major beneficiaries.

2. A very basic presupposition of health is the availability of and easy accessibility to *clean, drinking water*. Lack of it, especially in times of severe drought, is the cause not only of immense hardship to women, but the cause of morbidity and mortality of millions of children every year. After 40 years of independence, thousands of villages in our country do not have access to this basic human condition of life. *It is of utmost importance that the Government takes up this issue on a warfooting and devises schemes to remedy this situation.* While all women would benefit, those in the informal sector, who carry a heavy work-load would benefit particularly by such easy accessibility to safe water supply, which would reduce their drudgery.

3. As an increasing number of women move out into the job-market, one of the important problems they face is the lack of housing facilities. From this point of view too, housing, including *subsidized hostels for working women with and without children*, is increasingly being felt as an important need by women workers. Housing is an important issue for women workers also in the context of a change in the man-woman relationship that our country is going through. An increasing number of women are becoming sole or major earners, and an increasing number of them, especially those who have jobs or occupations, are refusing to live a life of complete subordination and subjugation. An important obstacle in their being able to assert themselves is the fact that often houses and property are in the name of the man and inexpensive housing is difficult, if not impossible today. *Schemes for giving housing to the poor, should allocate substantial quotas for single women, especially those with children. For the rest, they should allocate land pattas and housing jointly in the names of both husband and wife.*

4. Most women in the unorganised sector live in slums, pavements, bastis and other makeshift shelters. It is necessary that, for a start, the people in bastis, slums and pavements be given *adequate subsidised housing, with adequate drinking water and sanitation facilities.* The houses need to be close to their place of work, and *space provided for conducting home-based production activities.* *Credit should be provided for building production shelters.*

*Women's work-space needs should be incorporated in the housing norms of the housing schemes of the State and the area should be a minimum of 200 square feet.*

5. *Regular work and a living wage should be guaranteed to all women.* It has been the experience of most women that after they start working for a wage, though their income is distributed in the family, there is a definite change in the family diet pattern in her favour. Very rarely do women receive an increase, proportional to their contribution, as many socio-political factors intervene. Yet, security of a regular wage would make a definite positive contribution to the health of the women workers.

6. In view of the fact, that children, especially small girls, in poor families have to stop education and begin work at an early age, and usually it is hazardous work, we make the following suggestion: *Girls should be given a substantial stipend for completing their education, which could be combined with training and production which is useful, but not hazardous.*

### **Mental health needs**

70. Mental health is an important element in the general well-being of women workers in the informal sector. Physical insecurity and the anxiety due to it, often lead to psychological ill-health. Besides, a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability paralyses women workers still further. Hence it is necessary that:

1. There should be *stringent punishments for rape, sexual harassment, eve-teasing* and other actions threatening women. The Government should legislate a *Prevention of Violence Against Women Act* to cover harassment at work-sites, homes, streets, police stations, and prisons.

*Work-site harassment also be included in labour laws* and be included in the Industrial Disputes Act, where the burden of proof should be on the man.

2. There is also the need for a *Prevention of Domestic Violence Act* to cover specifically wife-beating, childbattering, molestation, marital and domestic rape and mental cruelty.

3. Since seclusion is a reason causing immense mental and physical problems for women workers, especially some sections of home-based workers, conditions should be created so that it is unprofitable to keep women secluded. This could be done by offering substantial stipends or financial assistance to women for training and education. These training centres should also have creche-facilities. The Government should also subsidise community centres with recreation, entertainment, sports and counselling services.

4. All necessary steps must be taken to stop harassment, intimidation and extortion of women in the informal sector, by the police and other officials and authorities.

5. The Law of Evidence must be changed, in view of the fact, that many of the most serious crimes against women, are committed in situations without witnesses e.g. rape, dowry harassment, marital violence and sexual assault.

### **Availability of and accessibility to health care facilities**

71. Increasing the availability of, and the accessibility to health care facilities, are important in order that the recent positive advances against diseases reach the mass of poor women. Statistics on health facilities and their use indicate that women go to hospitals and contact medical functionaries less often than men. Studies also indicate that, the amount of money spent by households for medical treatment is greater for men and boys than for women and girls. The result is higher morbidity and mortality among women, including a very high maternal mortality rate.

72. When women do go to seek medical help, they experience great discrimination at the

hands of the medical system due to a lack of understanding of the social situation of the women in poverty groups. It is necessary to tackle these problems at a social level as well as at the level of the medical system. It is necessary to critically evaluate this bias in the present health-care system and attempt to change it radically. In fact, the entire medical education in the country needs to be evaluated. There should be Refresher/Orientation courses for the doctors on subjects of women's work and health. It is necessary that the medical education should recognise occupational health hazards especially in the informal sector. These should be a part of the regular courses in the curriculum. It was especially evident as the Preventive and Social Medicine Departments had not even considered the possible problems of health of this sector. In spite of letters to all the PSM Departments, hardly any response was received. A few visits to PSM Departments by the Task Force and by the National Commission also brought to the fore this neglected area which requires to be studied by both medical personnel, social scientists and professional social workers.

73. While ensuring better choices for women, including women's access to safe deliveries and safe and free abortions, it is necessary to stress the immediate abolition of the oppression that comes directly from the Government—pressure on women both as promoters (ANMs, teachers, nurses) and as receptors of family planning methods, the target approach to family planning, and the promotion of dangerous methods like injectable contraceptives and amniocentesis. In fact, the entire emphasis on 'Family Planning', to the detriment of access to other health care facilities, needs to be strongly opposed, not only because it is oppressive in itself, and has caused misery to millions of poor women in the country, but also because it discredits the public health system and makes poor women workers dependent upon private, exploitative medical practitioners, or they have to do without any medical facilities, even when they desperately need these for abortions, deliveries and serious illnesses.

74. Besides, the primacy of free, effective health care for the poor and for rural areas needs to be emphasised, rather than the sophisticated medical facilities for a few which today consume a major share of health care finances. Certain concrete steps need to be immediately taken to facilitate the reaching of health-care to the poor, labouring women:

1. The timings of the dispensaries and hospitals should be fixed in a way which would be convenient to working women, who cannot forgo their income for medical care.

2. Necessary medicines should be adequately stocked and the hospitals and PHCs should be operated in such a way as to keep the number of visits of the women to the minimum necessary, if they are to avail of the treatment, otherwise, they get discouraged and do not continue.

3. There should be a 24 hour creche facility for women patients with children in every hospital and PHC.

4. Women should be allowed two free bus-rides to the nearest PHC every month.

5. Dais who are the only source of help for the majority of women, should be taken seriously, as a vital source of rural health care. Their skills should be enhanced via on-going training and their regular involvement in public health work should be encouraged.

6. Women should be involved at the village level as Community Health Guides if women's access to health care is to be improved. Teams comprising one literate and one experienced older woman, though not necessarily literate, may be the most desirable, both in terms of outreach and accessibility to women. Their training should include both preventive health education and curative care. Mahila Mandals should support these women health workers and assist in the maintenance of linkages between the official health care system and village women.

## Occupation Related Recommendations

74. Women workers are involved in the three crucial types of work, productive social and reproductive. These women workers need, as well as have a claim to certain facilities, by right. It is necessary that these rights be recognised through the following measures:

### Living Wage

75. Living wage should be assured through legislation and the organisation of women to demand and protect their rights. Without assuring adequate wages, it is meaningless to discuss health or measures to ensure health. This needs to be given priority, especially because today women work hard for long hours for a miserable pittance.

2. Paid leave and holidays including two weekly offs.

In the formal sector, workers are entitled to a break after four hours of work as well as leave provisions and one or two days paid weekly off. These are provisions the workers have won after decades of struggle, because it is physically absolutely necessary, if one's health is not to break down completely. These provisions need to be extended to the workers in the informal sector too.

3. Regulation of working hours

This is particularly necessary in the informal service and production centres, where there is considerable exploitation of the poor with long hours and no over-time. Piece-rates should be converted into daily wages based on the normal quantum of work completed at a healthy pace. Only then, will women not have to work long hours to make a meagre living.

4. Maternity benefits

A majority of the women workers, in almost all the sectors, have to work till the last day of pregnancy and go back to work immediately after a few days. This affects the health as well as, the life expectancy of both the child and the woman. It is absolutely necessary that women are entitled to paid maternity leave, as well as nutritious food, during pregnancy and after delivery.

5. Health Insurance

Health insurance, including compensation for accidents, should be available to women workers. Health cards should be distributed to them, as is supposed to be done in the beedi-industry, but is not effectively implemented. Through this, they would be entitled to receive health care of their choice at any public health facility (Primary Health Centre, sub-centre,ESIS Hospitals, Municipal dispensaries, T.B. hospitals or general Government hospitals,) and/or recognised private facility upto a certain stipulated limit. The latter is necessary because workers are often located far from any Government facility, have no transport, or money for any transport that is available, and often find the timings of the Government facilities, unsuitable. In addition, in medical emergencies (complications during childbirth, accidents etc.), the nearest facility may be a private one.

Accident insurance for both temporary and permanent disabilities, monetary and health benefits, should be available through both public health and private facilities as mentioned above.

6. Provision of a safe work-place and safety equipment,  
(including personal protective equipment)

76. Ideally, it should be insisted that every workplace should assure safety to the workers.

This may imply mechanisation of processes which are hazardous. This, in turn, means loss of jobs/work for the women, which cannot be permitted until there is alternate safe work for women, and new training facilities for them. This is an important element in improving the health of women. Till then however, it is necessary to provide safety equipment including powerful exhausts to remove harmful dust from the work environment and personal protective equipment like masks, feet protectors, eye glasses, ear muffs, gloves and other comfortable, strong contraptions for the safety of women workers.

#### Labour Commissioners

7. Today, there is an appalling neglect of this sector by the various offices of the Commissioner of Labour in the states. They should be made more accountable for their work in the informal sector.

#### Health education

8. Preventive health education, both with respect to occupational and other health problems e.g. (anaemia, leucorrhea), should be initiated through the Workers' Education Board. Special training courses for women workers should be initiated through these boards.

#### Old-age benefits and pension schemes

9. Due to the very nature of work in the informal sector, as well as the conditions in which the women live and work, women age very early in life. During their working life, they live a hand-to-mouth existence and are not able to save anything for their old age. Hence, they are forced to continue to work or are reduced to beggary, if they find it physically impossible to work. Old-age security and pension is an absolute must for this section of the population. Every woman has added to society' benefit and should receive protection in old age from it. Hence, it should not be necessary to require absolute indigence to merit a pension. On visit to the states, the plight of widows and deserted women, with sons, who were alcoholic and did not care for their aged parents, was pathetically distressing. Because the women had sons, they were not entitled to a pension. These women had been self-respecting workers all their lives, but were now reduced to almost paupers.

#### Basic facilities

10. Facilities like latrines, drinking water, ventilation, should be made available at women's workplaces and living places, as lack of these seriously undermines the health of women workers.

Electricity should be made available on a priority basis to workers, particularly those whose trade adversely affects their eye-sight they includes chikan and ready-made garment workers, zardozi workers, weavers and others). Electricity should be supplied to women workers at non-industrial-non-commercial rates.

#### Creche facilities

11. Creche and anganwadi facilities should be made available at women's workplaces and/or living areas.

#### Subsidized tools of trade

12. Subsidized tools of trade e.g. (carts, tools, etc.) and/or machinery e.g. sewing machines, charkhas,). Tools, machines and protective, which reduce occupational health

problems, should be given priority.

13. The State should provide credit to women, (and small consumption loans, for investing in bettering their working conditons.

14. A comprehensive Health and Safety Act should be evolved and enacted. This Act should give the workers:

- (1) right to information about ehemicals and work process at the work-site.
- (2) right to inspect work-sites
- (3) right to demand guards for machinary, monitoring and controlling levels of dusts fumes and fibres in the work atmosphere.
- (4) right to demand personal protective equipment, and
- (5) right to stop work if the conditons. are faund unsafe.

This Act should be evolved in consultation with workers, trade unions and concerned voluntary agencies.

#### Introduction of new technology

15. Before introducing any new machinery, equipment or process, these should be screened and approved by representatives of women workers involved in that particular occuption where these are to be introduced. The women workers should have statutory rights to screen and approve new machinery, equipment or process, or any changes in the existing ones.

#### Priorities in research

16. The Indian Council of Medical Research, National Institute of Occupational Health, National Institute of Design, and such other organisations, should undertake occupational health studies of women's. These should be done with a view to developing simple preventive and protective mechanisms and machines acceptable to workers which would reduce health problems.

Special emphasis must be placed on the ergonomic aspect of women's work, including postural problems. Innovation in the production processes which could reduce health problems should be examined, with workers guiding and advising throughout, and such innovation be recognised and rewarded.

### Technology Related Recommendations

77. We can summarise here some criteria for scrutinising the potential negative and positive effects of technology on women and their health:

1. All technologies which are labour-displacing must be rejected a priori.
2. All technologies which are likely to take over tasks currently pperformed by women (for wages or self-employment) and, therefore, likely to displace them, must be placed under women's control by:
  - a) Training women in its operation and maintenance;
  - b) Providing credit facilities to women only for its acquisition;
  - c) Being designed for women, with their participation.



**Back breaking work leads to postural problem.**

3. All technologies which are likely to directly and indirectly increase women's workload must be accompanied by other technologies or measures to ease or eliminate these side effects. In other words, systems approach should be used to develop packages, rather than the current uni-dimensional approach. These multi-faceted packages must be gender-sensitive and women-biased.

4. The development of new technologies for traditional, or even modern occupation, must be prioritised, beginning with women's occupations. In other words, technology development must be selective, designed to impact positively on women's work, whether wage-work or non-wage work.

5. Development of simple or appropriate technology in the form of tools, implements, and protective devices, to remove or reduce the work-related hazards faced by women, must be given top priority and taken up on a war-footing. Mechanisms must be created for involving the women themselves in the research and development process, so that the results are appropriate and useful to women.

6. In the specific area of health technology—particularly contraceptives and sex-determination techniques—strong and immediate steps must be taken to withdraw or ban such technologies where they are actually damaging the health of already vulnerable poor women. Measures for women's education and health promotion must be strengthened.

7. Priority must be given to the selective or preferential training of women in new areas of technological development. Schemes like TRYSEML and DWCRA—can readily be utilised for this purpose.

8. An advisory committee, with some power of veto, must be set up at Central Government level to monitor the impact of technology on women. The Committee should also actively identify and promote the areas for research and development of pro-women technologies.

9. Existing technologies, which are not appropriate to women, though they are almost exclusively utilised by women (sewing machines, table heights, cashew nut sifters, etc.), should be redesigned on a priority basis. The redesigning should be based on women's anthropometric measurements.

10. Thirty-five per cent of all the research and development funds of national research and design institutes should be reserved for occupational health studies of women's work and working out changes in these for the convenience of women workers.

## **Recommendations Related to Future Research Areas**

1. Multi-centred studies of health problems of women workers in specific occupational groups should be undertaken by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on a priority basis. These studies should cover:

- (a) the occupation related health problem—direct and indirect,
- (b) the general health problems of women workers,
- (c) special stress should be on the effects of the triple burden on women.

2. National Institutes like the ICMR, ICSSR and other bodies should give priority to research on health problems of the unorganised labouring women. It is a pity that a leading institute like the ICMR does not even have a women's cell to look into the health problems of half the country's population. However the present tendency of thrusting research related to women to a small cell is also questionable. This has implied in practice that the small cell conducts studies specifically on women, while the major portion of the personnel, research projects and finances of the institutes focus on men. In fact, what should happen is that while the entire institute, say, the ICMR or the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH)



should focus on workers, both, women and men, the women's cell should try to take up issues related more specifically to women.

3. The ICMR, NIOH, (NID), and such other organisations, should undertake occupational health studies of women's work. These should be done with a view to developing simple preventive and protective mechanisms and machines acceptable to workers, which would reduce their health problems.

## Strategies for Implementing these Recommendations

79. Respecting the complexity of the situation of women workers, it is necessary to adopt a multi-pronged approach for women workers in different occupations and regions. An important aspect of this is the actual implementation of the present legislation where some of the provisions have already been legislated for some sections, as in the Bidi and Cigar Workers Act, the Contract Workers' Act, the Minimum Wages Act. These legal provisions have largely remained on paper. It is also necessary to devise mechanisms for the implementation of these and other provisions to women workers in other occupations in the informal sector.

80. While it would be ideal to make a list of the various occupations women work in, and work out a whole set of legislations for these, incorporating the above mentioned provisions, the complexity of women's work in the informal sector would make such a simple approach meaningless, though it would be necessary to do so in certain occupations. But, by and large, women workers are compelled to change their occupations, depending upon the availability of work. For example, agricultural women workers, in certain seasons and during period of drought, would have to work at the employment guarantee schemes, as bidi workers, as domestic workers.

81. When there is little work available, women workers may work as rag-pickers, as prostitutes. After a certain age, prostitutes may work as domestic workers.

82. Secondly, whichever occupation women workers may be economically active in, their socially productive and reproductive work does not cease. Hence, the social security and health schemes that need to be worked out should apply to all women, irrespective of their particular occupation. This is also necessary because this society has created certain specific occupations for women and yet continues to victimise the women for it. It is difficult for women prostitutes to want to claim health care facilities, if they are compelled to reveal their profession, because they know they would be victimised in other ways for doing so. Women work day after day, producing future generations of workers as well as daily replenishing the existing labour force, working for social capital, gratis. Thus, every employer, private or public, should be made to pay for the facilities to women workers, irrespective of whether women are employed in the particular occupation or industry. This could be in the form of a common cess or levy.

83. In order to implement the above mentioned schemes and measures, some alternative mechanisms have to be worked out. Some of the possible alternatives are sketched below:

84. Occupations which are potentially, by the nature of their work, 'formalisable', like most of the occupations in the manual sector, should be so formalised in the form of Women Workers' Boards, which take up the responsibility, financially and structurally, to ensure the facilities outlined above. The finances may be collected through a specific cess or levy on every employer depending on the number of days the women have worked there and on the number of days the women have worked there and on the profit and turnover of the employer. These Boards would have the legal authority of ensuring that employers employ workers who are the members of the Board. This would take care of employers making some workers under-cut others and weakening the bargaining power of all the workers in the process.

85. These Boards would necessarily have to be, not huge centralised giants, but decentralised bodies, so that women workers would have some say and control in these. There could be say, one Board in one ward of a city and some similar area grouping at the town and village level. It would be possible for voluntary and other agencies and trade unions to act as watch-dogs and facilitate the smooth functioning of the Boards. To begin with, it is possible to start a Board in one or two occupations e.g. construction by involving different agencies and trade unions. Through the experience of the working of these Boards, a better fool-proof scheme could be evolved for the other occupations in the country.

86. At the same time, training courses for women should be organised—training for skill upgradation e.g. learning masonry in the occupation of construction work, rather than the 'unskilled' nature of women's work today. Skill training should also be made available to women who do not want to do the work they are doing at present, but would like to change their occupation e.g. rag-pickers. It is also necessary that the Government establishes Women's Industrial Training Institutes, which train women in more marketable skills, with less health hazards.

87. In occupations, difficult to formalise, one could visualise a community-based structure, in which women could produce, exchange for the community and get paid for their labour eliminating the middlemen.

88. These general provisions for ensuring better health care, ensuring long-term betterment like education, and skill training, are important and can be concretised and initiated immediately. Those, however, which pertain to particular occupations like registration of women workers in the occupations, providing them with identity cards have to be worked out in the particular context of the different occupations. Identity cards for homebased workers are important in order that they can avail themselves of the legislative provisions like, the Beedi and Cigar Workers, Act; However, no such move for prostitutes can even be considered as it would make them more vulnerable to exploitation and biased social prejudices. Hence, it is necessary to have greater in-depth consultations with women workers in different sectors to work out a detailed concrete plan of action and/or legislation.

89. The condition of women workers covered by legislation like the Minimum Wages Act, the Contract Labour Act, and other protective legislation, is a strong testimony to the fact that today legislation has no teeth and the question of implementation of these laws leads to a vicious circle of the unorganised sections not being able to enforce legislations and remaining unorganised. This is especially true of poor women living and working in remote rural areas. A completely new mechanism for the enforcement of legislation needs to be worked out. One possibility is that trade unions and women's organisations may be given the authority of supervising the implementation of legislation.

90. Today, the executing authorities, like the Factory Inspectorate are not accountable to the workers of the occupations and industries, where they are supposed to be executing the laws. It is necessary that a public accounting system be initiated, whereby the workers, and concerned organisations have access to the functioning of these authorities and are able to monitor these closely.

91. The sections of the Factories Act, 1947, dealing with occupational health and safety, have a number of loopholes and flaws, which render them ineffectual. To begin with, the Act itself covers a very small section of the workforce. Workers who are within the purview of the Act too, find it difficult to benefit from it because 1) the doctors are the only people who are supposed to report the notifiable diseases; 2) the managements are the only agencies to report the reportable accidents; 3) the workers or unions have no role to play in the enquiries of the accidents.

# 7

## COMMUNICATION NETWORK SYSTEMS

**C**ommunication is the foundation of all organized group activities. Throughout history, different channels of communication have been powerful instruments for transmitting values, moulding beliefs and attitudes and changing life styles. Conversely, changes in the socio-economic structure have also affected the form and content of communication media.

2. A truly democratic set-up presupposes two things: first, that the information generated is freely available to all and second, that the flow of information is not merely from the top to the bottom, but also the other way round. Without this free, two-way exchange of information, communication media cannot be effective agents of change.

3. Women in Indian society have traditionally had a very marginal role in the process of communication. Their opportunities for collecting information were generally restricted to meetings at the well, temple or market place. Control of communication media, be it printed or otherwise, has been vested in men. Therefore, the images of women projected by men are according to their perceptions and their desire to retain women in the background to serve the needs of men and play a secondary role. Women have been almost totally powerless to correct the many false images of them perpetuated by the media.

4. In the twentieth century, communications technology has made tremendous strides. It is now theoretically possible to reach the remotest corners of the earth. In reality, however, the poorer sectors not only do not have access to this modern technology, they are by and large totally ignored by it. Many are still dependent on information upon religious heads and local leaders controlling the economic resources and having political clout. The few token references to them made in the formal media are generally biased and ill-informed.

5. This is especially true of poor women. They continue to be heavily dependent on men for information and their own lives and problems are given little recognition by both the local

community and the media. A recent publication of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states that: "Of all the hours worked throughout the world, women contribute about two-thirds... women in rural areas grow at least 50 per cent of the world's food. They work in all aspects of cultivation, including planting, thrashing, weeding, applying fertilizer and harvesting. In some regions, they market what they grow. Many of them provide the main or only support for the family". However, this reality is not reflected by the communication network systems.

## Policy

6. The Indian Government has yet to come up with a well-formulated national communications policy. The Seventh Plan document claims that "The major thrust of the plan relating to mass media will be to raise the level of people's consciousness and enrich their cultural and social life and make them better informed citizens. It will assist in stepping up the pace of development of programmes and sensitize the people towards national and international events of importance". However, the plan does not clearly spell out how this can be achieved. On the 24th May, 1987, it was announced that a long-term national media policy had been finalized by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. However, to date, no policy announcement has been made.

7. In the absence of a meaningful communications policy, both the public and the private sector media continue to be governed by commercial norms, giving no visibility to poor labouring women thereby depriving them the opportunity of being brought into the mainstream of national life and having access to information.

8. Here the Communication Media examined include the mass media viz. print media, radio, television and cinema, advertisements, theatre, folklore and other forms of traditional media, educational media viz. text-books used in the formal system and primers used in adult education schemes, communication, methods of grass-roots organizations as well as the DAVP and the role of government functionaries as communicators.

## The Print Media

9. The role of the print media as the watch-dog of social consciousness has been reiterated time and again <sup>2,3,4</sup>. The images of women and work constructed in the print media, the information disseminated on various issues and development programmes are vital not only in changing societal attitudes to women but also in ensuring that women are made aware of various developmental schemes formulated for their benefit.

## The Indian Press:

10. A brief survey of the Indian print media reveals that at the end of 1984 the total number of newspapers was 21,784. Among them, 1,609 were dailies, 111 tri/bi-weeklies, 6,469 weeklies and 13,565 other periodicals. Given the low literacy rates in India the outreach of the Indian Press is necessarily low, but in spite of this, we cannot deny its significant role in formulating public opinion. The total circulation of newspapers/periodicals as on 31st December 1984 was 6,11,47,000 copies as compared to 5,53,91,000 copies in 1983—an increase of 10.4 per cent.

11. In 1984, the majority of newspapers in all languages, except Sanskrit and Kashmiri, were owned by individuals. These "individual owned newspapers" had the largest share in circulation i.e., 36.6 per cent. This means that the Indian print media is largely controlled by the private sector and the basic motive of profit and marketability pre-determines its policy

orientation and news coverage.

12. As a private sector, concern, the print media depends heavily on the corporate world and the advertising agencies, which exercise financial control through advertising revenue. The ownership of most big publishing houses and advertising agencies, notwithstanding a few token females, is almost totally in male hands. This imbalance is not unique to the media, but is the manifestation of deep-rooted socio-economic deprivation based on gender.

13. At the same time, it is heartening to note a newly emergent trend over the last decade—the growing number of women journalists, editors, sub-editors and reporters who are sensitive to women's issues. The overall impact of the women's decade and campaigns by activists against atrocities, have helped to focus public attention on women's issues.

Considering these facts, the Commission was interested in examining:

The mainstream print media covering issues related to poor women, the issues left out and the perception of women's roles while presenting information on women and work.

### The Sample

14. In order to gauge the treatment given by the mainstream print media to the problems and lives of women of this sector, it was decided to undertake three very small studies on the English and Hindi print media. These two languages were chosen because the out reach of the English print media transcends regional barriers, while Hindi is not only the national language but has the distinction of being used in the largest number of newspapers and periodicals published. Studies from the South have not been included due to shortage of time. The sample selection was not very large, but as the content analysis was in-depth, the findings are likely to be applicable to the mainstream.

15. For the study of the English media it was decided to monitor all the 1987 issues of the Sunday Observer newspaper published from Bombay and all the 1987 issues of Femina and Eve's Weekly magazines. The study of the Hindi Press covered two of the most popular women's journals—Grihashobha, a monthly magazine, and the fortnightly magazine Manorama. Five 1986 issues and four 1987 issues of Grihashobha were monitored, together with seven issues of Manorama.

### Women's Issues Covered

16. Over the last two decades, due to the constant campaigns of women's groups and the overall impact of the women's decade, there has been a steady increase of serious coverage on women's issues. This is also because women themselves are becoming increasingly articulate and vocal. Issues such as violence, dowry and sexual harassment, which were at one time dismissed as the problems of individual women, are being seen within socio-political structural context. The result is that there is an awareness in the print media that women wish to discuss problems such as gender insubordination, social and sexual exploitation, legal disabilities and wage discrimination.

### Work Participation of Women in Agriculture

17. The women's decade has focussed on invisibility of poor women and has made an attempt to correct the picture. In 1975, at the start of the Women's International Year, a journalist analysed 150 reports in a village series going back to 1969. It was found that concern for agriculture predominated, but only five references were made to women's work in agriculture. Her report on women's work in agriculture and cattle rearing contrasted starkly with the absence of such references, in agricultural reports in the media. Her report brought

about a marked change in the attitude of the Press to women's work participation in agriculture. Interestingly, the impetus for this came from the Government, with the publication in 1975 of a special issue of Indian farming, on women in agriculture. This Government initiative was taken a good 10 years before the Food and Agriculture Organization adopted this as the theme for World Food Day in 1985.

#### Coverage of Special Problems of Women

18. The media coverage on drought, for instance, did not just focus on the general problems faced by all rural people, but specifically pin-pointed the extra work burdens on women responsible for the fuel and water supply of the household. Similarly, a review of the Bhopal gas tragedy mentioned the specific medical and occupational problems of poor women and the organizations seeking to help them.

#### Gender Discrimination

19. Several articles highlighted and questioned gender discrimination in various professions such as the media, civil service and judiciary. In an article entitled 'Have Women Taken Over?' a woman journalist pointed out, that despite being more visible in journalism today, prejudices against women persist. In another article, two women I.A.S. officers drew attention to the gender discrimination which exists in the upper echelons of the Civil Service.

#### Political Participation

20. Women's political participation and the fact that there are proportionately too few women in Parliament, was pointed out in the print media; also highlighted was the fact that the percentage of women voters has steadily increased until they are now a force to be reckoned with.

#### Issues Pertaining to Women's Legal Rights

21. Three Supreme Court decisions with positive implications on the status of women, which received favourable treatment by the Press include: The right of women in the Syrian Christian community to inherit paternal property; the responsibility of women with independent means of maintaining their parents; and the maintenance granted to Muslim married women under 125 Cr. Penal Code.

#### The Problem of Women Working in the Organized Sector

22. The Press has shown itself to be discerning in dealing with any blatant discriminatory practices brought to its notice. For example, while it welcomed the Supreme Court judgement on the wage discrimination case won under the Equal Remuneration Act by Audrey D'Costa, a stenographer, it also pointed out that the contradictions in the interpretation of this law: while the stenographer won her case under the Equal Remuneration Act, an Air hostess, while challenging, her service conditions, lost her case.

23. The unfavourable service conditions of Telephone Operators got media-attention after the incident when a Minister did not get his call through. Likewise, the exploitative conditions under which the bar girls of Bombay worked was brought to the notice of the Press only after a Minister raided a bar. The Press also brought out the plight of 1,500 bar maids, who would be unemployed if the Government attempted to rescue them by enforcing Section 33(3) of the Shops and Establishment Act of 1948, according to the lawyer appearing on behalf of

the bar girls, this would be a violation of Article 21 of the Constitution which grants the right of livelihood.

### Prostitution

24. Prostitution has always had sensational news value, but a shift in attitude was noticed in the positive coverage given to issues such as the attempt made by prostitutes to organize themselves. The article entitled 'Prostitutes Unite to Fight Hoodlums' covered the work of Mahila Sangathana an organisation in the red light areas of Calcutta which attempts to protect these women from hoodlums. Another article 'A Day in the Life of a Social Worker in Kamathipura' described plans to set up a mobile creche in the red light areas of Bombay for prostitutes children, to suit the working hours of the mothers.

### Dowry

25. Dowry and bride burning are issues that have received extensive coverage. A special report was made on the decision of the Kewal Oswal community to boycott the conjugal family of a dowry victim who died in Dahisar on April 2, 1987.

26. Women's Organised Action frequently succeed in getting a forum in the Press. Attempts by women's groups to draw attention to the misuse of amniocentesis tests to abort female fetuses and their call for a ban on High Dosage E.P. drugs at a public hearing organised in Bombay by the Drug Controller of India under the injunction of the Supreme Court, was widely covered in the Press.

27. Similarly, efforts by Women's groups to stop the glorification of sati, the five day Asian Women's Conference on 'Women, Religion and Family Law' at Bombay, and the celebration of March 8 (International Women's Day) were given extensive coverage in the Press.

### Women's Achievement

28. Apart from depicting women's problems, there were also articles on their achievements in non-traditional fields. For example, a report on a police station in Kerala staffed entirely by women, and portrayal of women elected to a cooperative board in the Nipani Wadgaon village in Maharashtra, by a predominantly male electorate. The latter reported that the women's group won the election because the villagers were fed up with the functioning of the previous (male) cooperative boards. There were also profiles of an activist journalist, who won a prestigious journalism award, a woman who became the youngest director of the PTI and political activist.

Although coverage of poor women was very rare, we did come across profiles of two Adivasi women: Smt. Sonabai—an Adivasi painter—and Kanta Bahar Tyagi—a social worker.

### Biases in Presentation

29. In all fairness to the Press, it must be admitted that there is greater coverage on women's issues over the last few years. The effort, however, has by no means been exhaustive, the issues which have received coverage are still largely those that affect the urban elitist sections of society.

### Sensational News

30. By and large, sensational and sexcentric articles on women, predominate especially if the issue develops into a political crisis and has all the elements of potboiler. The sati incident

was sensationalised by the entire Press. In one of our sample papers, sati was covered only on September 20 although the incident occurred on September 4, and very soon, the issue dwindled into smaller follow-up news reports. The paper did not comment on the loopholes in the Sati Bill and the whole issue was soon dismissed as a 'non-issue'. The Hindi print media tended to merely rehash what had already been published, and did not attempt any critical analysis.

31. Similarly, the virginity test conducted on the Raipur nurses was sensationalised and received a lot of news space. It was covered in three issues of our sample and in one issue was given full page coverage. The virginity tests conducted on the nurses as a criteria for employment in the Government hospital is crucial in highlighting the vulnerable and low status conditions under which nurses work in India, but by stressing on the sensational aspects, this issue and the blatant gender discrimination was side-tracked.

### Ambivalent Attitude of the Press to Women's Issues

32. By and large, there is a lack of deep perspective or even ideological position in the paper, resulting in contradictory coverage.

33. Crimes against women receive a lot of coverage, but are usually sensationalised with headlines such as 'Minor raped in K.E.M. Hospital.

34. There is an attempt in the print media to maintain the *status quo* and counteract good articles on women with negative ideas and images. For example, an article on harassment of women may be subsequently trivialised by a light-hearted account on 'eve teasing' highlighted by a cartoon.

35. Sometimes, reactionary and fundamentalist statements which help to subvert women's rights and cloud crucial issues get prominence. After the Sati incidents, for example, reactionary statements by fundamentalist religious leaders were given prominence without any editorial effort to contradict them.

36. Patriarchal values and journalistic irresponsibility occasionally emerges. For instance, one of the issues carried the results of a so-called nation-wide readership survey (carried through a coupon in the periodical) on the question of amniocentesis. According to the magazine, 65 per cent of the readers are for amniocentesis and only 35 per cent consider it immoral. The editorial also says that 26 per cent of those who oppose amniocentesis, are unmarried and 'therefore do not know the difference between a son and daughter'. The article concludes by saying 'In this age of small families, when abortion has been legalized and is morally acceptable, amniocentesis should also be. The majority of readers—also favours it'. Twenty cotton saris have been awarded for 20 coupons received.'

### Sexist Attitudes Towards Women's Achievement

37. Rarely is full credit given to women who achieve leadership position. The subtle suggestion is that women owe their leadership positions to social or political links with men. For instance, while portraying Sharmila Barit, the first woman to become the Director of the PTL, it is suggested that she owes her leadership position to the fact that she is the daughter of the proprietor of a successful newspaper.

38. Likewise while describing the women who have been elected to the leadership posts of a cooperative board, the implication is that these women did not succeed on their own initiative, but due to behind-the-scenes male jugglery and string-pulling.

### Invisibility of Women's Work

39. By and large, there is rarely any focus on women's issues, even when articles



ostensibly cover traditional women's crafts. An article on Ghathu for instance (the embroidered Himachal kerchief used by labour women in H.P.) talks only of the history and craftsmanship, and does not mention the weavers and their lives.

### Distortions of Women's Images

40. Vimal Balasubramanyan, an activist journalist, feels that the media frequently 'distorts the feminist viewpoint and also seeks to cash in on it, sensing that the new ideas of women's liberation do invoke a good readers' response and that being a 'vehicle for progressive ideas, enhances the media's own image and the image of its controller'.

41. Columns devoted to gossip and light reading generally denigrate the image of women. Gossip snippets have sexual innuendoes and only further, succeed in objectifying women.

### Issues Left Out

42. The above glimpse of the Indian Press, makes it clear that the one important change in the past 10-15 years is the greater visibility of women's issues notwithstanding the survival of old stereotypes and sexist imagery. Almost without exception, there is a relatively greater coverage of women's issues in established dailies and magazines in the form of news stories, investigative reports, features, special columns and articles. Despite this, there is a glaring absence of coverage on women in the unorganized sector, these women only make the news if they are raped or molested by people in power. Vital issues like their work, the occupational health hazards they face are rarely discussed. For instance, the eyesight problems of women 'chikan' workers of Lucknow who work in dingy dimly lit rooms; or the health problems of women bidi and tobacco workers. As contract labourers, these women are exploited by the contractors. But being in a vulnerable position and poorly paid, they can rarely protest. As one women piece-rate worker in the unorganized sector of the garment industry said "we are forced to give our children opium as they would otherwise interfere with our work"<sup>5</sup>, This kind of exploitation and the silent desperation in their lives are rarely treated as newsworthy.

43. Laws relating to labour, such as the Minimum Wage Act, 1948 are rarely covered. Likewise, Government welfare schemes for rural development rarely receive the necessary exposure, so that at least through word of mouth, information may trickle down from one literate person to another. The overall picture which emerges is that newspapers show a singular lack of concern for labouring women. Their plight, poverty and invisibility hardly seem newsworthy matters. Even when media attention is given to the women in this sector, they are just incidental to the story. For instance, while reporting on the bank official's action on raiding the house of a poor widow in order to recover bank loans, the accent is on the high-handedness of the officials rather than the plight of the poor women.

### Advertisements

44. The subversive power wielded by commercial considerations needs special mention. Journals and newspapers depend heavily on advertising in order to reach out to the readers at a reasonable cost. As the print media is heavily propped up by the corporate world through advertising revenue, commercial considerations dominate.

45. Advertisements in the papers are increasingly becoming high-pressured with excellent lay-outs and visuals. In a randomly selected issue of one of the newspapers in English it was found that 30.65 per cent of the space was utilised for advertisements. The portrayal of women in the advertisements reinforces stereotypes and creates the impression of women as mere sex objects. In one of our studies, it was found that the total number of

advertisements was 1.194 which means that the average number of advertisements per issue was 24.39. Out of this, an average of 12 advertisements were in colour, occupying half to quarter page space. The advertisements covered a wide range of consumer items including McDowell's Whisky, cigarettes, toilet soaps, detergents. They are aimed at creating 'wants' in the reader and promoting a consumer culture, in which poor people have no place. Super discounts and fabulous sales are constantly announced to boost the sales of consumer products, creating a feeling of inadequacy among the lower income groups.

46. Advertisements use beautiful women to sell products as diverse as soap, cooking oil, bed sheets, towels and even motor bikes. If the aim of the advertisement is to provide information about a product, women are not required to decorate them. Such advertisements only objectify women.

47. When we recall that the total number of advertisements in one of our samples is 1,195 which means that each issue of our sample carries an average of 24.39 advertisements with an average of 12 in colour, we find that women's issues have to compete for space with other regular features. Similarly, among the two magazines that have been scanned for a year, one maintained an advertisement quota of 50 per cent space, and whenever the tally went up, the number of pages devoted to editorial content was reduced. The other magazines of the same genre maintained an advertisement quota of 20 per cent. The result is that even serious, well written articles on women are juxtaposed with colourful, well laid out advertisements that carry negative and stereotyped portrayals of women. Thus while the editorial content decries the sexist portrayal of women, the same magazines carry sexist advertisements without a murmur.

48. The portrayal of work in advertisement is both sex-linked and stereotyped. Women are shown only in nurturing roles or in what may consider extensions of such roles, such as nurses and teachers. Not only are poor women in the unorganised sector ignored advertisements, perhaps because they do not have the purchasing power to constitute a potential market but are wrongly represented with misleading references made about their work. For example, the advertisement for Sintex Loft Tanks and certain brands of detergent imply that maid servants will stop grumbling and start smiling with the introduction of their product. Perhaps, their poverty and lack of purchasing power put them beyond the pale of corporate concern.

#### Images of Women

49. Most advertisements address women as housewives, excited by their new purchases. A family is projected as woman's only source of happiness and identity and she must constantly use newer and newer consumer products to fulfil herself as a wife and mother. Advertisements of Sanifresh toilet cleaner, Harpic and Maggie Noodles to name a few fill this bill.

50. Women in the unorganised sector, if and when they are portrayed, are presented as stereotyped grumbling maid servants in spotless shining kitchens. In another situation because of the use of a certain detergent the housewife is able to do the work herself and need not depend on the maid servant. The emerging image is that of the maid servant as a quarrelsome and easily dispensable entity, being patronised by the mistress who showers her with useful gadgets.

51. In short, advertisement encourages a consumer culture wherein women are stereotyped as house wives whose only source of happiness is serving the family.

#### Conclusion

52. Even this brief survey of the print media reveals; 1) singular lack of concern for

labouring women, especially rural women, their lifestyles, perceptions, problems and organisations. The media still tends to ignore women's economic role.

53. When women's issues are taken up by the English press it covers those issues which could concern the urban reading public. By and large, there is an ambivalent attitude towards women. Sensational news on women gets considerable coverage. Sati, the virginity test scandal, sexual harassment got coverage more because of their sensational nature than due to any real concern for women. Often, there is a contradiction between two articles in the same issue.

54. Women's issues quickly disappear from the public eye, as it is assumed that the reading public are not really interested in them. While the press gleefully follows every minor political development in Delhi and the fortunes of the Indian cricket team, there is rarely any serious follow up women's issues.

55. When women's problems are discussed, the focus is on urban middle class women. For instance, articles on how women's legal status can be improved, discuss laws relating to property, employment, marriage and divorce, which are referred vis-a-vis the urban, educated women.

56. Advertising helps to rigidify role models and create a consumer culture, where self fulfilment is only achieved by buying newer and newer consumer products.

57. In the process of constructing these images, advertisements help to buttress middle class norms, maintain the status quo and increase the invisibility of the women in the unorganized sector. Women are led to consider work as a temporary phase in their lives until family finances improve, but not as an activity which needs real commitment. At the same time, the stereotyped images of women are reinforced. The overall picture which emerges is a singular lack of concern, for the poor women of our target group, their plight and poverty.

58. To sum up with the words of Vimla Balasubramanian "Despite their coverage on women's issues, the mass circulation glossies have no overall editorial perspectives nor a committed ethical stand on women's questions." Like a consumer product, the mass media opts for a 'mix' that sells; where women are concerned, exclusively sexist fare. Now there is an added component—because the women's question is "in"

59. There is no doubt that there are concrete limitations regarding the print media as an instrument of social change. Still, the media can play a crucial role by sensitively depicting the problems of poor women, which can create a positive public opinion about the women in the unorganised sector and help to set in motion the wheels of progress.

## The Radio

60. In a country like India, with an oral tradition that goes back 2000 years, audio-visual media such as the radio, cinema and TV have a deep impact on the people. 'The outreach of the radio outstrips other systems of communication. Its importance in our country should be considered proportionately higher. Radio programmes are radiated from 170 transmitter, of which 131 are medium wave, covering 90.30 per cent of the population and spread over 79.81 per cent of the country's area. TV, on the other hand, which has also emerged as an extensive national network through 185 transmission stations, has an estimated outreach of only 70 per cent of the population. Thus, though TV seems to have outstripped the radio, in reality, the radio is still the only source of entertainment and information for the vast majority of people, particularly in rural areas.

61. All India Radio is entirely owned by the Central Government. Its broadcasting network consisted of six radio stations in 1947. Now there are 71 stations including three Vividh Bharati commercial centres at Chandigarh, Kanpur and Vadodara. There are relaying

centres at Alleppey and Ajmer, in addition, there are two auxiliary centres at Bhubaneswar and Shantiniketan. These cover all the important cultural and linguistic regions of the country.

62. Commercial radio broadcasting was introduced on 1st November 1967. Advertisements are accepted in any language, as tape recorded slots of 7,10,15,20 and 30 seconds duration. Sponsored programmes have been introduced from May 1970. From April 1, 1982 commercials have been introduced on a limited experimental scale on the primary channel. Since January 25, 1985, this has been expanded to include sports and sponsored programmes on rural and women's issues.

#### Programmes for women

63. Special programmes for women were started in 1940. Today, all stations of AIR broadcast programmes for women two to three times in regional languages and at times in dialects too. Some stations like Bombay, broadcast 50 minute programmes in English for working women (implying thus that only women who know English work.). Women's programmes form 1.4 per cent of the total broadcasting time. Though women's issues can be discussed in other programmes too, this is rarely done, and therefore this specific time, generally in the afternoon, is described as 'purdah hour'. A cursory glance at the content of about an hour's slot for women's programmes suggests that about 60 per cent of the contents are entertainment-oriented, including songs, plays, skits, etc. and only 20 per cent each on awareness generation and dissemination.

64. One of the important problems faced by unprotected women workers in the unorganized sector is the lack of access to information about government schemes for their benefit, like credit facilities, employment opportunities, legal protection and medical benefits.

65. The Commission was interested in examining how effectively the information provided by the radio reach the target groups, what has been the perception of women's role in the target group in the programmes and what are the barriers in communications.

66. All India Radio, Delhi broadcasts information relating to credit facilities, employment opportunities, legal relief, medical benefits etc. for our target group in various programmes such as Mahila Karyakram, a programme for urban women, Grameen Mahilaon ke liye (Programme for rural workers), Swasthya Charcha—(health), Gram Sansar (composite programmes for rural audience).

67. This report is based on findings of the members of the Commission during their field visits and substantiated by a survey of the audience research unit titled "a Survey of Information needs of women workers in the Unorganized Sector" and by referring to critiques of the radio by various women's groups.

68. The study conducted by the audience research unit was limited to the Delhi station of the AIR. There is an urgent need to undertake similar studies from other broadcasting stations as well, but the shortage of time precluded us from achieving this objective.<sup>6</sup>

69. In order to find out the listening habits and assess the utility of the programmes through purposive sampling, about two hundred interviews were conducted in areas near Meherauli, Trilokpuri, Nandnagri and Uttamnagar.

70. About 30 per cent of the respondents were engaged in construction work, 24, per cent of them worked in quarries, 20 per cent in mining, 15 per cent as domestic servants and about 11 per cent were self-employed sellers on the road side.

#### Findings

71. The points highlighted in the study conducted by the audience research unit are that the out reach of the radio was only 44 per cent of our target group, out of which only 10 per

cent were frequent listeners. Most of the women did not own radio sets. The peak listening time was in the evening and at night. To most of the respondents, the radio was primarily for entertainment. About 57 per cent could not recollect listening to programmes on developmental issues.

72. Women who had received no benefits from the Government's developmental programmes, were sceptical of its use as a source of information.

73. An evaluation of the programmes recorded in various studies points out that by and large, issues relating to women are slotted for the special women's hour, popularly known as 'Purdah hour', even though such issues may also be focussed on in the general programmes. This mode of structuring women's issues and slotting them into an exclusively feminine hour presumes that the message of equality, the need for changing customs and values, and issues such as domestic violence and rape concern only women, men have no need to change. Sometimes, male participants are included in the discussion panel to provide a different perspective, but often the end result is that traditional values get indirectly reinforced. In a discussion on rape, for instance, with a male psychiatrist in the panel, the whole exercise was turned into a discussion on the psychology of the rapist and in a way, the act was condoned. There is also a tendency to talk down to women and to limit programmes literally to household interests, including nutrition and child care.

74. While there is a broad division of urban women into housewives and working women, middle class women remain the target group. In the absence of any positive direction, the objectives of information and entertainment are interpreted differently by the various producers. Often, in order to play safe, the focus is limited to the so-called exclusively feminine spheres such as Ikebana flower arrangement, mother craft, health, etc.

75. The introduction of sponsored programmes in the women's programme has trivialized the entire purpose of consciousness raising, and the skits and plays reinforce negative stereotypes of women, emphasising, family-centred roles. Informative topics are effectively sidelined as the main focus of interest is entertainment.

76. Women are taught to acquire marginal economic independence through knitting, sewing, making jams and jellies. No attempt is made even to suggest to women that they could train in non-traditional occupations by opting for careers as plumbers, electricians or skilled masons rather than unskilled labourers in construction work.

77. Women are provided beauty tips but no advice is given to women unhappy in their marital home on how they could take recourse to law. Advice is given on how to be a good wife and a good mother by making adjustments within the family situation. Advice on child care telling the women in the target group to keep children indoors etc., invited sarcastic comments such as "as if children will stay indoors." The radio 'entertainment' consists of sentimental songs, skits and plays. The women in rural areas are also fed with the same stereotypes. Without considering their specific problems, health measures generally concentrate on family planning without being followed up by extension workers or health visitors.

## **Advertisements**

78. There is a rapid expansion of commercialization and since 1935, advertisements and sponsored programmes are accepted on rural programmes and women's programmes. This implies that despite All India Radio's avowed aim of raising social awareness and to stimulate and "inform the national consciousness in regard to the status and problems of women," the kind of advertisements shown creates contradictory images of women, that only reinforce stereotypes.

An analysis of radio advertisements indicates the following:

1 The dominant image of a woman is a housewife and mother washing clothes with 'Plus washing soap' or 'Nirma washing soap'. The Plus washing soap advertisement implies that "there is some special joy derived from washing clothes with Plus." Similarly, we find the Surf advertisement addresses women with the very familiar Lalitaji who is so shrewd that she prefers the long term benefits of using Surf compared to the use of cheaper brands. Women are heard lovingly feeding their families with Aary Shrikhand or a certain ayurvedic tonic. To treat household concerns as primarily feminine concerns, is to yet again reinforce stereotypes. For instance, the magazine "Women's Era" advertised on radio its cookery special issue with the slogan 'build your personality, build your home.' Does this mean that it is only through cooking that a woman can build her personality? Further, advertisements which cover a wide range of consumer articles are made more attractive with lucrative gifts. Fortunately, as the advertisement code specifically bans advertisements of cigarettes and tobacco products, these advertisements were missing.

2 Advertisements depict an ostentatious life-style and generate an expanding desire for luxury items. As seen, in the other media, they sell consumer dreams which the majority in a poor country like India cannot hope to realise. This generates frustration and some studies have linked "the increasing incidence of dowry demand, dowry murders in urban lower middle class families to the consumer culture promoted through advertisements.

3 The spots and sponsored programmes broadcast on rural programmes and women's programmes are continuing of the consumers point of view recommended to the Verghese Commission 1978 where the consumer groups contended "What the items currently advertised through commercial broadcasts were elitist and could, over a period of time, build up unfulfilled aspirations and false needs. The broadcast media were agents of social change and should not abandon educational role."

4 Women in the target group are largely invisible in the advertisements, skits and plays. Their lack of purchasing power again puts them beyond the interests of advertisers and as such, the advertisements rarely address them. In skits and plays the stereotyped image of the maid servant seen in other audio-visual media, persists.

#### Hurdles in the effective reach

79. During their tours to various States, Commission members identified major communication barriers which prevented women from receiving the information relayed on the radio and taking advantage of it. As the most of the women workers work almost 12 to 14 hours a day, they do not get time to listen to the radio. However, some maid servants do listen to music on the radio even during the day time. As expressed by some women, "We are here only to earn bread. We work the whole day and do not find time to listen to the radio. In any case, who has a radio? It is not meant for us. Very rarely, we may listen to folk songs on the radio at a neighbour's house."

#### English

80. Secondly, the language used on AIR is sophisticated and too difficult for ordinary people. As men and woman construction worker said: "We do not understand the language."

#### The Concept of Radio as entertainment

81. Radio plays an important role in entertainment; music and particularly film songs, provide entertainment to the tired working population who cannot afford a TV. When asked why they listen to the radio, the most frequent response cited was. "We listen for recreation,

not for information. Thus its role is perceived only as providing entertainment and not discrimination of information. So the informative programmes are never popular and do not get an audience. This is substantiated by a study which showed that 57 per cent have time. For example, during peak farming seasons, the men frequently carry the set in the fields.

No availability of radio sets for women's use/lack of access to radio sets

82. Unfortunately, even radios are not easily accessible to women. The exclusive appropriation of the set by the menfolk in the family for their own use. During cricket matches, for instance, it is a common sight in big cities to see men and boys listening to the commentary on transistors. This probably means the women in the families are deprived of access to radio programmes. Similarly, in rural areas, the set is kept in the baithak which in the outer apartment reserved for men; further, being portable, many men carry it with them, thus depriving women of listening even if they have time. For example, during peak farming seasons, the men frequently carry the set into the fields. During the commission's tour, village mahila mandals asked for transistor sets. A transistor is a status symbol in the village, and often it is an item given in dowry.

83. The reach of the radio to our group is only 44 per cent. Most of them do not own sets and during the commission's tour, village mahila mandals asked for transistor sets and 57 per cent did not recall listening to programmes on developmental issues and were sceptical about the information given in these programmes.

84. Sponsored programmes and advertisements project contradictory images of women. In fact, radio, which is a vast and under-utilised instrument of consciousness raising has been reduced to a mere hand-maid of the film industry; the film songs for instance, encourage the listeners to make it a point to view the films.

85. Women's programmes are of an uneven quality, depending on the biases and prejudices of the programmes. By introducing sponsored programmes in the women's hours, educative consciousness raising talks are juxtaposed with skits that reinforce stereotyped role models of women. This effectively sidelines the message of the educational programmes.

86. An important point noted during the field trips was that whenever relevant information was given, women made special efforts to listen. For instance, in the border states, women were keen to know about the movement of the army. Similarly, health information is also appreciated by listeners.

## Television

87. T.V. as a system of communication was introduced in 1959, expressly to promote development and education in a developing country. The low literacy level in the country makes the vast majority of Indians specially dependant on oral and visual systems of communication. This makes television more relevant in the Indian context.

88. Before we examine the projection of our target group on T.V., a brief look at the spread of the medium will provide a context to our subsequent discussion.

89. Though initially the T.V. transmission was confined to a few big cities and for a very limited time, today T.V. begins with breakfast T.V. programmes in the morning and on week ends transmits for practically the whole day. In 1987, there were 221 transmitters in the country. Doordarshan now covers 97 per cent of the area and nearly 70 per cent of the population.

Television programming could be divided into four categories:

(1) The Hindi feature film and film-based programmes like "Chaya Geet" categorised by Doordarshan as super 'A' with a viewership of more than 70 per cent.



She participates actively in dissemination of information.

(2) Various plays, news telecasts, sports events and sponsored programmes classified as 'A' with a viewership of between 50 to 70 per cent.

(3) English serials, youth programmes etc. classified as 'B' with a viewership of between 30 per cent to 50 per cent.

(4) Rural programmes like Amchi Manse and programmes for industrial workers classified as 'C' with a viewership below 30 per cent. As pointed out by the Joshi Committee "There is an exploitation of the female form to titillate and by their socially insensitive approach simply trivialise and debase the effort" (report of the working group on soft ware for Doordarshan vol. 1, 1985.p.141). Since then, if there has been any change, it has been for the worse; there is even more reinforcement of patriarchal values and reactionary beliefs. Serials, such as 'Ramayana', some of the episodes of serials 'Stri' and 'Shakti', or superstitious beliefs propagated through 'Honi Anthoni' are a few examples of serials which specifically denigrate the status of women.

90. In this context, it is obvious that poor women will not be Doordarshan's target audience. Even if they are, they do not always have access to television. The needs and problems of self employed women do not seem to be known to T.V. programme producers.

The report on the projection of poor women is based on.

#### Visibility

91. Women of the target group featured on all sample days, but their presence was limited to only 50 of the 255 programmes which fell within the sample. Sectoral programmes catering to farmers women, youth and children respectively featured poor women only seven times, though the number of such programmes in the sample was 33.

92. Of the four women's programmes where poor women featured, three were for rural



women. In these there programmes, issues raised related to laws relating to work, seasonal employment, hours of work, wages for equal work, Employment Guarantee Scheme, women in farming operations, women and health care facilities, and housewives as beneficiaries of the welfare scheme. The programmes for urban women dealt with adult education were introduced by visuals showing women pounding rice, pulling carts, cultivating and working in anganwadis. The three programmes for farmers all featured poor women as cultivators and seasonal labour.

93. Enrichment programmes such as 'Ek Hi Uppay' on sanitation and Jalraband featured women of the target group as painters, leather workers, basket weavers, fisherfolk, head-loaders, spinners and printers. Their special problems were highlighted. Out of 47 news bulletins, women featured in 19. They were generally featured as beneficiaries of welfare programmes.

94. The fiction and entertainment programmes featured poor women as housewife. Very rarely were they shown engaged in non domestic work. Sometimes they were shown as domestic servants. Working women in the unorganized sector, are featured less frequently and when they are featured, they are shown in the least skilled jobs—farm labourers, head loaders, etc.

95. The women were generally seen as beneficiaries of welfare programmes and not as workers. The welfare orientation was especially sharp when poor women were featured in news bulletins, where the focus is on government initiated welfare schemes. As the media perceives women only as passive beneficiaries, the programmes for farmers are rarely addressed to women, although both men & women work in agriculture.

96. There were, however, many programmes which could have discussed the position and the problems of poor rural women, but which failed to do so. Discussions on the Eradi Tribunal Award, as well as programmes for youth and children, both rural and urban, are examples of programmes which could have incorporated women's problems. Women's programmes which dealt with women entrepreneurs referred to urban industrialists. The Telgu programme on status of women focussed entirely on urban middle class women. Though a disjunction was noted between women's actual lives and media representation, poor women were not mentioned.

#### The invisibility persists

97. Strong efforts have been made by concerned individual producers and experimental groups. For instance, Bhadke bale che zindagi (Life is in flames) is a four part serial which investigated a case of death by burning and also included serials dealing with women's economic and social status. Similarly, a few other programmes made an effort to profile a 'bidi' worker or a maid servant, but by and large the self employed woman are invisible and distortions persist.

98. Another problem noticed is the urban bias. In the sample of 255 programmes, an overwhelming majority, 230 of them, were urban-based; that is, the issues addressed related to urban areas and were discussed by urban experts. It is clear that the medium's output is heavily weighted in favour of the urban middle and élite classes. With the exception of one or two programmes, the welfare-orientation of the state towards the target group women is marked.

99. Sponsored serials such as Buniyad and Khandan of yester years and women-centred serials such as Zindagi, Shakti and Stri rarely project the problems of poor women. In serials like 'Nukkad', where an attempt is made to portray the life of the poor, women have a subsidiary role.

100. Since TV thrives on advertisements and sponsored programmes (with the new rates introduced in 1987) the erstwhile objective of education or information through television is now relegated to the back seat. The saleability of a programme is the major criteria. Advertisement often address women in their traditional role as purchasers or emphasise an artificial ideal of femininity in which there is no place for poor women. Women are stereotyped as housewives, mothers or wives whose wisdom revolves around knowledge of hair oils and tonics, ever-ready to take care of the husband and children when they return from work, school or play. The woman as a temptress is also used in the sale of clothes. As consumers, women are shown buying soaps, detergents, cosmetics or processed food. These projections are oriented to middle and upper classes of society and yet again, poor women are invisible.

101. Welfare programmes aimed ostensibly at knowledge generating promote the view of the poor as ignorant of welfare schemes and unwilling or slow in taking advantage of them. They are held to be the authors of their plight, rather than victims of distorted development. For instance, the short presented on minimum age of marriage or spacing of children, specifically address the poor.

102. Poor women and their struggles are invisible on television. Where such women are projected, emphasis is on their domestic and maternal roles, they are consumers and not producers. The medium does not enable viewers to appreciate the genesis of their poverty. Instead it sponsors the welfare approach.

#### Poor women's access to television

103. According to official estimates the television covers 70 per cent of population yet in reality poor women lack access to this medium. A Doordarshan study made in 1981 which covered mostly the urban areas and privately owned sets, reported that nearly 46 per cent of adult viewers were women. But it is obvious that social restrictions on going out and the burden of household chores prove to be the main factors preventing women in our target group from going out and viewing television in community centres.

104. Another study examined T.V. viewing habits, message retention and portrayal of women of our target group in certain specific programmes which make them visible in the period under study. The programmes telecast by Delhi Doordarshan were monitored. Some of the specific programmes which focussed on women were: 1. Anganwadi—an interview with Shanti Devi from Gurgaon (HR) who makes and sells chullahs in rural areas. 2. News—carried reports on sericulture as a vocation for the production of handloom cloth, carpet making as a family business in Arunachal Pradesh and pottery making. 3. A play depicted the problems faced by domestic workers. 4. A discussion on water management included the water problems of women in the non-formal sector. 5. A family planning quickie on spacing children.

105. These items formed part of the total programme and their duration ranged from 30 seconds to 3 minutes approximately.

106. Several others who focussed on poor women; for example, the feature 'Sach Ki Parchain' (an investigative programme) which focussed on urban development and housing schemes, included interviews with women belonging to the informal sector. Similarly, a programme on water management and various news items also focussed on poor women; a short film on proper spacing was essentially aimed at educating working class women; a play, 'Badalte Rishte' explored the world of a domestic servant, and the problems she faces in deciding for herself what work she will do; 'Giddh', a feature film, portrayed the problems faced by women labourers, but with some degree of glamourisation. However, it successfully highlighted the vicious social cycle which surrounds these women and trapped and the difficulties they face emerging from it; and lastly 'A face in the Crowd' shown in the morning

transmission highlighted the living conditions of people belonging to the informal sector and efforts at their improvement by a voluntary social worker.

### Findings

107. Unfortunately, access to TV is not as easy as is often assumed. For example, there was no electricity in one slum and in the other slum, there was electricity but not a single TV set. In a colony of 400 huts only one hut owned a set. Some of the children of this slum watched TV with their neighbours in the resettlement colonies, especially feature films on Sundays and sometimes, Chitrahhar. But the most of women of the slum, especially those who work as artisans or domestics, were too busy during the transmission timings, none of them expressed any desire or interest in watching television. "Even if we go to someone's house to watch T.V. nobody would like to have us as guests every day or every week", they said, these women occasionally snatched a few glimpses of TV from a distance while cooking in the kitchen or while sweeping the floor or standing near the door in their employers' homes.

108. The Anganwadi workers working in slums owned T.V. sets and watched serials, feature films, Chitrahhaar and programmes between 8.00 p.m. and 9.30 p.m., but they could not recall any of the items mentioned earlier. The messages given in the short films were retained and were appreciated by them. Some of them even recited these messages.

109. Women in the villages—potters, sweepers, vegetable sellers—never watched any TV programmes and those who did watch habitually lacked message retention and usually only watched the entertainment programmes. For example, Dhanti Devi, a potter had a T.V. set in her house, but the women of the house watched only the feature film, Chitrahhaar and some serials. A serial like "Swayamsiddha" could not sustain their interest. The T.V. set was switched off after 9.30 p.m. only the men watched the news.

110. The women were not aware about programmes, like 'Anganwadi' and Ghar Bahar. However, on being informed about the timing of Anganwadi, they said, "that is our kitchen time, we cannot watch T.V. then."

111. None of the sweepers in this village owned a T.V. set and unlike other villages, their low caste forbade them from entering their neighbours' houses to watch T.V. In any case, most of them claimed to be too tired at the end of the day to rush through their household work and find time to watch T.V.

### Observations

112. The findings of the various studies and the observations made by the Joshi Committee on Software, confirm the invisibility of poor women. T.V. the medium which is supposed to educate and inform, has very little information about the actual condition of poor women, or about schemes available for them. Furthermore, the prevalent welfare approach that colours most programmes projects them as passive beneficiaries, incapable of thinking and bettering their lot.

113. Doordarshan repeatedly portrays women as house-bound engaged in home making, entirely dependent for their existence and fulfilment on their husbands and children. The struggle that women are waging for economic and political autonomy, legal rights and identity is almost completely ignored. On the other hand, certain upper class lifestyles are glamourised and a consumerism is encouraged, especially through advertisements. The concept of a job as a transitory phase in a woman's life leads to mystifying their role as housewives.

114. The indifference to poor and rural women extends to women viewers. There is a complete indifference to the problems of this sector. Agriculture cycle, seasonal variations,

daily pattern of work are rarely considered while scheduling programmes for these women. Finally, unless the community television viewing facilities are provided, the objective of reaching out to the majority of women will only remain a pipe dream.

## Cinema

115. Despite the popularity of the small screen and the video, cinema still remains the cheapest and most sought after mode of entertainment for the vast majority of Indians.<sup>10</sup>

116. The film industry has invested capital of Rs. 720 million and employs over 210 thousand persons. On an average around 850 thousand viewers visit the country's estimated 12,701 theatres every day. India produces the largest number of films in the world. In 1986 alone, 840 films were produced.

117. Big money being the base of this industry, these are no governing ethics whereby producers and financiers are motivated to impart messages for healthy socio-economic development. The prime concerns of commercial cinema are profit and entertainment. In the process, traditional values are reinforced and gender stereotypes promoted.

### Notions About work in Mainstream Films

118. Work is an undeveloped theme in Hindi cinema. There are hardly any films dealing with problems, struggles, or achievements that are work-or even vocation related. The Hindi cinema is pre-occupied with glamourizing women as sex symbols and portraying work and poverty as transitory and unfortunate phases in a woman's life. There is hardly any space for the harsh, back-breaking, poorly paid, reality of most working women. The work life of these women when portrayed exists only as an adjunct to the prevalent themes of violence and sex. Although, there are a few notable exceptions, there is an overall failure to engage work seriously as a theme.

119. Secondly, although the vast majority of Indian people live in rural areas, an overwhelmingly large proportion of Hindi films have an urban setting. Rural women's work, be it fetching water or washing clothes, is prettified and romanticised. The prime focus is on sexual harassment and on making the poor woman a vehicle of a rich man's fantasies.

120. In recent years, a few films have depicted a woman's profession as an ordinary part of her life, but as a rule, women in Hindi films, no matter which section of society they belong to, work only when their families have fallen on evil days. Thus though, she be a capable bread-winner, the woman is shown as conscious of her aberrant status.

121. Thus the employed woman in general is viewed with ambivalence. The hostility towards her may be masked as pity so long as her earning is perceived as a mere extension of her role as a provider of services to the family. Non-domestic work is depicted as 'unfeminine' and in competition with men. This is noticeable in films like Jeevan Dhara and Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon ata hai. In Agreement the heroine's success as a business woman is linked to her insistence on dominance over her husband and refusal to bear children and her gradual conversion towards the end. Case studies revealed that poverty, besides being a permanent plight, was hardly ever glamorous. The Hindi films not only fosters an abhorrence amongst working women for the work they do, but also create a yearning for acquisition of middle class values instead of inspiring them to fight oppression and strive for better conditions in their immediate working relationships. This leads to escapism and churns dreams that can never be materialised.

### The Notion of Poverty

122. Most women working in the unorganized sector in India are poor and deprived.

Therefore, the depiction of these women will invariably be influenced by the notion of poverty intrinsic to the Hindi film.

123. Most Hindi films are set in a north Indian, urban, upper middle class milieu. If the setting is rural, they protagonists are big landowners or plantation owners, or occasionally middle peasants. But even if they are shown as middle class, their life-style is usually unrealistically glamorous.

124. Very few Hindi films focus on the lives of poor people as the primary subject matter. Usually the protagonist is shown starting life as a poor person, with certain typical middle class poverty attributes in terms of dress, mannerisms and values; poverty is, therefore, more a verbalised, than a visualised condition. It is presented as an aberration a—mishap that has fallen on an individual family and therefore, by definition, a condition which must, sooner or later, be overcome. As long as this temporary condition lasts, it provides an opportunity for the protagonist to berate the rich, extol the virtues of the poor and express socialistic sentiments. Eventually, the middle class protagonist returns from poverty to middle class; the viewer's involvement is thus, with the particular fortunes of this family or individual, which is hardly typical of most families in real life. The viewer does not have to grapple with the real face of poverty in our society; poor sanitation, overcrowding, squalid living conditions and scarcities of various kinds.

125. Depicting poverty as a temporary condition also means that the protagonist family has little or nothing to do with other poor people in any continuing way. A community, if present, little is, more than a faceless backdrop, and as soon the poverty phase is over, the poor vanish from the scene altogether.

126. In one sense, poverty is external to the hero's being. This is most clearly signified by his clothes. The hero's transition from a childhood spent in poverty to middle class adulthood is conveyed through the shabby, short-clad child by fashionable, trouser-clad, young man. Questions like how the poor child acquired an education, for example, are rarely posed or answered.

127. In another sense, however, poverty is depicted as a moral, rather than a material, condition. Going through poverty is one way of establishing one's credentials as somehow morally superior to the villain in particular, and to other upper class people in general.

128. This notion, recurrent in Hindi films, has links with the compensation motif of fairytales and fables. However, it is disturbing to note that over the last two decades, there is a trend in Hindi films showing effect of poverty on the protagonist not as an increase in compassion or identification with the poor but rather in a fierce, ruthless competitiveness in climbing the social ladder. This kind of rags-to-riches hero mouths pseudo-socialist rhetoric but behaves like a ruffian, this earlier deprivation lends everything a stamp of respectability.

129. In this scenario, the poor woman can either be a sentimentalised victim (usually the hero's mother) whose sacrifices sour him on in his self—aggrandising career; or most frequently, the destined wife of the hero. In this latter role, she climbs the social ladder by marrying him and leaves her low grade employment behind for housewifery, even as he replaces his low status job with a high status one.

130. The poor woman is, at one level, the vehicle for the upper class man's sexual fantasy as an easily available woman and, at another level, a vehicle for the maximum amount of sentimentalising over poverty. She is the victim par excellence, she suffers not just because she is poor but also as wife, sister or mother, sacrificing herself for the male.

131. That reality is near-invisible to most film makers is also indicated by the fact that although a majority of labouring women in India work in agriculture—as hired labour or on family farms and a large proportion in home-based work—these women and their work are

almost never seen on the screen.

132. It is no coincidence that poor women most frequently appear on the screen in roles where they directly service the middle class—domestic servants and entertainers. The urban unorganized sector is relatively more visible in films. They are those and who come in contact with the middle class residential area, such as vendors of various kinds. This too indicates how pointedly the Hindi film focusses on the sphere and concerns of the urban middle and urban classes.

#### The Notion of the Employed Woman

133. The poor working woman stands at the nexus of two notions that of poverty and that of the employed woman. The woman employed in any kind of remunerative work is viewed with deep ambivalence, and often hostility, overt or covert, in the Hindi film. Of late, a few films have seriously depicted women with independent professions but this is still rare.

134. In the case of the poor woman, economic necessity appears more clearly as the reason for her going out to work, so she is most often perceived as a pitiable victim. But as she is not a domesticated, secluded wife and mother, she represents a potential threat to the middle class domestic set up and so must be chastised. The rape/seduction/death which is too frequently her doom, is a convenient means of making her a martyr, an icon for middle class breast beating and simultaneously, of disposing of the threat she represents.

#### Sentimentalised Victim

135. At one end of the spectrum is the unorganised woman worker, as a 'pure' victim untainted by any sign of rebellion or competitiveness. This is signalled by her being a mother—of sons—and usually a widow or deserted wife.

136. As a mother, her existence is devoted to the well being of her sons. If she has any tenuous links with a community, these are served as the film progresses, so that the image of the lone woman facing the big bad world is heightened. Similarly, in *Deewar*, a link is initially established between the injustice suffered by the community as a whole and by the particular family whose fortune the film follows. However, the link is quickly snapped and the struggle turns into individual vendetta.

137. It is noteworthy that the dehumanising working conditions are not brought into focus. None of the other labourers, men, women or children, are shown feeling any strain. The wrongs of womanhood only provide a pretext for the film maker to indulge in gory violence between men and sentimental family reunions. In this scenario, work is only a symbol of her plight, and not a material reality at all.

138. The younger poor woman, on the other hand, begins her life as a maid servant. At one end of the spectrum, the maid-servant is merely an adjunct whose presence establishes the protagonist's status. She is herself a nonentity. The strenuous, routine, uncertain part of her work never becomes visible. A second role commonly allotted to the maid-servant is that of comic relief. The third kind of portrayal, where the maid-servant graduates to being a wife, also hardly provides any scope of depicting her work life. The controlling idea here is that the faithful female servant is best equipped to become a wife because the essence of wifehood is unswerving loyalty and self-abnegating service. Here the depiction has very little to do with her actual work.

139. As authors mention very aptly, "since work scarcely figures as a reality of the poor women, it matters little whether she is a prostitute, a dancing girl or a domestic servant." As a servant she dances, as a dancing girl, she serves.

140. From the mid seventies, a spate of *Amithab* starrers developed the trend of gutsy,

enterprising young women from the unorganized sector (Yangewati in Sindhy) being picked up and groomed for wifehood. Having spirited occupational roles, however, were shown not to be suitable for serious work.

141. A very important aspect of 'work' in the films is that manual work is a transitory phase in the life of the protagonist and with marriage all the misery ends. For poor women, in reality, this rarely happens, as most of them continue to work at strenuous jobs even when they are pregnant and till they die.

#### Depiction of Prostitutes

142. Almost every film has a cabaret sequence. Whenever the dancing girl becomes a heroine, she is presented not as a real worker or earner, but wholly through a moral lens with no seeming concern for such mundane matters as money. Prostitutes are usually presented as miserable in their profession and yearning to escape into marriage. Most unrealistically, the brothels are shown as glittering and glamorous places, visited only by the affluent.

143. The fact is that the majority of prostitutes and dancing girls in India today are poor working women who face the same problems as other women in the unorganized sector. They lack unionisation, legal protection of any kind and medical care, and are forced to endure, low income unhygienic work conditions and harassment by the police, in addition to the social stigma and ostracisation and the burden of illegality that is unique in their work sector. None of this emerges in the Hindi film. Exceptions to this general trend have been *Mandi* and *Hamidabai ki Kothi*. *Mandi* in some ways has been an exception where many women have to continue as prostitutes at the end of the film and are not provided the attractive option of marriage.

#### Problems at work

144. The only problem at work for women in the unorganized sector that Hindi film takes definite cognizance of, is sexual harassment. This only strengthens the myth that sexual molestation is the inevitable lot of every working woman, especially if she is very poor. Film makers tend to obscure the other, more routine harshness of working conditions and injustices like unequal and less than minimum wages. This type of depiction also subtly conveys the message that it is safer to retain at home than go out to work.

145. In these films, the viewer is told next to nothing about the women's own perception of, or response to, the sexual advances. The dominant tendency seems to be to present poor women as dumb, pitiable victims. No effort is made to show whatever limited efforts are made by these women to resist such overtures. In films like *Paar* and *Chakra*, attempts have been made to portray the plight of the poor women, though the latter film does not portray women as workers. *Mirch Masala*, rather loud in colourful dresses, is an exception in depicting resistance.

#### Observations

146. The tendency of the Hindi film to stereotype the poor working woman and to evade any realistic portrayal of her life or work has been pointed out through these examples. Since film makers, by and large, avoid explorations of experience in all its complexity even in their own class, it is only natural that they rely more heavily on stereotypes when dealing with a section of society from which they are distanced. Subsequently, we will notice that even new wave films have not made any remarkable breakthrough in exploration of human complexity.

147. This most popular of the media has not only failed to depict the life and problems of the target group, but on many occasions has trivialised them. Until the overall male-dominated

value structure and blatant commercial motive of making as big a profit as possible, looking at woman more as an appendage and not as an individual, get further strengthened while depicting poor women. But women will continue to be looked at merely as appendages until the overall male dominated value structure of society changes and as long as profit remains the moving force behind cinema. In this context, to expect films to give development message or disseminate information which could empower women, is a pipe dream.

#### Education and Women in the Unorganised Sector

148. The main objective of including education as a component of communication was to gauge the image of women that the education system is projecting. Does the younger generation know about the innumerable varieties of income generating activities which poor women are engaged in? Do they have any idea of the dismal conditions in which these women are living and working? Do they know that these women work not out of choice but for the survival of the family? The Commission felt that these and similar questions need to be answered to provide direction for the future.

149. Unlike in communication, the education policy has explicitly declared that "education would be used as a strategy for achieving a basic change in the status of women. The national education system would (i) play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women (ii) contribute towards development of new values through redesigned curricula and text-books" (National Policy on education 1986, p. 106).

150. The policy further states that every educational institution should, by 1995, take up active programmes of women's development built around a study and awareness of the women's predominant, and for promotion of communication and organization among women"<sup>12</sup>

It is too early to say whether this policy will be implemented or not .

#### Educational and Women in the Unorganized Sector

151. In the present section, two major dimensions of education have been considered as far as women in the unorganized sector are concerned.

152. In the formal system, particularly at the school level, an effort has been made to assess the visibility and projection of target women in textbooks and through examination of the curriculum. Recognising the elitist overtones of our education system, it was deemed necessary to know how poor women are projected.

153. Visibility in non-formal education programmes was studied through evaluation of Adult Education primers. Here, the exercise has two objectives. Firstly, it was necessary to know how the target women were depicted in these primers—what kind of visibility did they have compared to the formal education system? Secondly, it was also felt that as the adult learners largely come from the lower middle class and poorer sections of the society, efforts made to make them aware of their problems should be examined. Are they provided with options to change the dire conditions of their life? Are they empowered to face their problems? These and similar questions are sought to be answered through studying these primers.

#### Projection in the formal education system

154. Earlier studies have clearly indicated that whether they are for English, Mathematics or Social Sciences, textbooks can, through the use of characters and symbols in certain situations, become a powerful medium for the perpetuation of stereotypes and role models. Girl for example, are rarely portrayed in roles associated with economic activity. While this is the fate of women in general, in terms of visibility, the projection of poor women is bound to be much less.



## Sample

155. In Gujarat, the State Board of School Textbooks is the sole publisher of textbooks, which are prepared by experts. For the present study, the sample comprised of Gujarati medium textbooks of Std. X—common stream. Std. X is the final year of school, at the end of which students take the Secondary School Certificate examination.<sup>13</sup> Gujarati medium and Common Stream textbooks were chosen since there were more students in these streams than in the science subjects and English medium streams.

156. In the books concerning the teaching of languages, the number of words referring to self-employed women were noted. The intention was also to look at the way in which these references are made and to find out if these are positive.

157. In the books on social sciences, general science and arithmetic, reference to self-employed women were noted. In all these, the language used, the space given and the number of references were considered important.

## Findings

158. The findings of the study are extremely disappointing and frustrating. In the English Reader, where there are 307 references to men and 96 references to women, there are only two references to poor working women. One is of a village woman going to a centre to spin an amber charkha', and the other of a maid servant in a rich household.

159. In a Gujarati textbook of 162 pages, or of 122 references to males and 65 references to females, there is not a single reference to self-employed woman. Even in the grammar book where references to employment have been made, our target women have no place. Similarly, in a Hindi reader of 124 pages, where 115 references are made to men and only four to women, there is no reference to poor women. Since the writers are mostly from upper castes and urban setting, they may not be aware of issues concerning self-employed women.

160. Social studies textbooks comprising of history, the Indian constitution, civics and geography, can boast of only four references to self-employed women. These are while narrating the effect of the Industrial Revolution in India; in the Constitution, reference is made to the directive policy in providing equal wages for equal work to both men and women. While elaborating on Gandhian thought, reference is made to the fact that Gandhiji discovered the spinning wheel from a woman. The next sentence is that spinning wheel began to be used in poorer homes. But in geography, there is no reference to women.

## Geography

161. In the Geography textbook in the chapters on scientists and astronauts, there is no reference to women. In the section on the impact of climate on people, a favourable climate and cheap labour were mentioned on two pre-conditions for tea-leaves plucking. Another mention on women is made while discussing the demographic situation. Here also, no comment is made with regard to the adverse sex-ratio. Thus, in a textbook of 203 pages, there is only one reference to poor women.

162. The textbook on Human Science surprisingly has no reference to the target group while discussing environment, diseases, needs etc. The same story is repeated about the textbook on arithmetic. In the exercises given, there are 75 references to men, 12 to women, and none to self-employed poor women.

## Observations

163. Thus, after scanning textbooks of seven subjects and browsing through about 1200 pages, we come across six references to poor women. Even these do not review women

sympathetically. On the contrary, it is suggested that female labour is useful because it is available cheap. Instead of making readers aware of the plight of these women, they are mostly invisible and when visible treated perfunctorily.

164. The picture emerging in the non-formal system appears to be no better.

The spread of literacy has been an important programme since independence. Though between 1951 and 1981, the percentage of literacy improved from 16.67 per cent to 36.37 per cent, in absolute numbers illiterate persons have increased during this period from 300 million to 437 million. Women comprise 57 per cent of the illiterate population and they mostly belong to the lower economic strata.

165. The National Policy on Education (NPE) accepted in 1986, envisages that adult education would be a means for reducing economic, social and gender disparities. Previous experiences have brought out, as mentioned in the NPE document, that programmes of literacy can become meaningful only when they come along with a package comprising practical information and skills relevant to the day-to-day needs of learners. NPE would, therefore, inter-alia, lay emphasis on skill development and creation of awareness among the learners of the national goals of developmental programmes and liberation from oppression. In the NPE document it has also been mentioned that special literacy primers and other reading material will be developed to enable learners to understand their rights and responsibilities.<sup>14</sup>

#### Adult education primers

166. Considering the fact that self-employed women constitute a cross-section of workers, their educational needs were identified as those pertaining to their self related to their work and to information on their rights as workers. Accordingly, certain criteria were adopted to evaluate the content of the primers.<sup>15</sup>



In addition to performing hard labour,  
**she** is motivated to learn.

- i) awareness regarding the recognition of the work of self-employed women in poverty stricken groups.
- ii) awareness regarding Government and voluntary action towards their well-being.
- iii) focussing their attention to self-perception, engineering thereby the desired level of self-assertion and eventually leading to becoming decision-makers.
- iv) nurturing a desire for physical well-being, including health, nutritional needs for self and family.
- v) developing communication skills and the added emphasis on reading, writing and numeracy.
- vi) realization of the importance of collectivity by learning organizational skills related with their world of work.
- vii) awareness generation building around the socio-economic reality with the perception of the possibility to change it.

On the basis of the aforesaid criteria, a tool for evaluation of the readers (Primers) was developed.

167. Alongwith the tool for evaluation a tool of instruction was also prepared as it was decided to evaluate adult education primers in almost all languages and the question of translating books in Hindi or English could not be even thought of considering the limited time and resources.

168. All the agencies involved in development of adult education material, such as the State Resource Centre, University Departments of Adult and Continuing Education and others involved, have been approached. Norms have been laid down by the Directorate of Adult Education and by and large, they are followed. Materials that have been considered is of all fourteen languages.

The following limitations may be noted:

1. Primers have, in general, a support provision with either manual for instructors or teachers' guides. These guides provide illustrations and also some descriptive material for the instructors to resort to, for explanatory purposes or for value orientation.

2. The material is available in the languages cited as above, but time being short, oral translation by interpreters and on-the-spot evaluation by the evaluator was done.

3. The books were not of the same numbers and size for the all languages.

4. In Hindi, materials were available from Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh. Besides, the materials as available from the Literacy House were quite pre-ponderant.

## Findings

170. The following table indicates the distribution of criteria in various language primers

Total Number of languages	:	14
Sample size total	:	171
Criteria Number 1	:	45 26.01
Criteria Number 2	:	59 34.01
Criteria Number 3	:	10 5.7
Criteria Number 4	:	170 98.2
Criteria Number 5	:	173 100
Criteria Number 6	:	10 5.7
Criteria Number 7	:	7 36.1

170 Obviously, the evaluation on the whole is weakest at Criteria Number 3 and 6. It

suggests that no effort has so far been made in the adult education materials in generating 'awareness and focussing the attention of the learners to a self perception' whereby they could deliberately attempt to become decision-makers. It is not very clear whether these learners are expected to be decision-makers, either. Also, collectivity has not been thought of as a good starter for making these women conscious of themselves. This is possible because most of the materials are not developed considering the specific needs of women per se. Secondly, it is very useful to note that criteria number 1, 2, and 7 did not get a positive reflection from the sample on the whole. Obviously, recognition of their work in the unorganized sector is not clearly manifested. Government and voluntary action is nowhere being fed into their perception through these materials and finally, no design is suggested for a model of awareness building. Individual authors' consciousness is discernible where a sentence gets introduced like "Rashida bahut kaam karti hai" or "Jaya Ko Kaam Ka Poora Paisa nahin milta hai".

171. In Oriya primers, there were frequent references to the life-styles of tribal women. But it is in the Tamil books that the self-employment of women, from vegetable vendors to fisherwomen working in the fields and headloading, figures prominently.

172. Typically, the books describe the women preparing the family budget accounting for sale proceeds; one of them describes the status of women as marginal worker and the author is satisfied by the projection. These books are not only those which have been developed by adult education agencies, they include some materials from 'Working Women's Forum' for instructor or organizer preparation. However, it should not be out of place to mention that Tamil Nadu achieved an international award for its effort towards education of adult women.

173. A primer for legal literacy for working women has been written in Hindi. But again, the focus is on the organized sector. Otherwise, Hindi and Urdu materials project women as mothers and housewives, without giving importance to them even in this role. Statements like 'Women is the pride of the house' and 'mother is a goddess', abound in the literacy manuals. The health and nutritional component of these primers is generally from the point of view of child rearing, rather than from the point of view of the work done by the women at home. Identification of different productive activities is poor. Fetching water and collecting fuel and fodder are mentioned very casually, without any reference to their being productive activities. Even women's work in agriculture, encouraged by some of the farmer's primers is not highlighted as 'self-employment'.

174. The variables in self-employment situations are generally available from the language books from the South and North East. Sericulture, teaplantation and collection of sea-shells are some of the activities mentioned alongwith working on handlooms and on handicrafts.

175. Deepayatan's teaching manual in Hindi highlighted the art forms of Bihari women. Obviously, as these activities are being projected on the macro-level, the perception of the writers of these books is improving. The limitation of vocabulary learnt in reading and writing poses a cumulative challenge to the authors.

176. While most of the material is quite rich in giving health and nutrition information only tangential reference is made to the women's work, as already observed in the previous pages.

## Observations

177. The findings have been quite revealing. Though unlike in the informal system of education, self employed women are not invisible in the primers, yet they **do not** sufficiently

project women's work with adequate emphasis. The middle-class notion of woman as a housewife, involved in household chores which are her bounden duties, continues to be reflected even where the working class is the audience. The evaluation suggests that if the message of self worth was to be given and learners be provided with more information on options available, much more concerned effort at material production by sensitive writers, will have to be done.

## **Role of Government Functionaries in Information Dissemination**

179. One of the lynch pins in the entire communication process is the dissemination of information of the various Government schemes by the Government functionaries.<sup>16</sup>

The constant complaint in connection with the Government schemes has been that apart from the fact that there are very few programmes for women, and whatever limited programmes that exist have not been formulated with women's participation, they hardly reach the group for whom they are meant. For instance, the recent directive in IRDP is to cover 30 per cent women beneficiaries, but hardly 15 per cent have been covered. It was also observed by the Commission members during their tours that in most of the places, women were ignorant about these schemes. Surprisingly in some States, even the local level government officials were ignorant about the directive.

180. The success and failure of development plans and programmes therefore, depends upon access to development communication, the channels utilized to provide access to such information, back-up services provided to concretize information and awareness into actual development gains and an upward movement of grassroot level feedback into policy and programme formulation process.

181. The moot point is whether all these requirements are fulfilled in the present scheme of implementation. Do the various agencies have an information system which ensures speedy and undistorted flow of information? Besides, using some of the evaluative reports and notes from the field reports, findings of two specially conducted studies have also been used here. One study has been in village near Delhi, and the other in South Gujarat. The latter attempted to contact the Government officials starting from District level to Gram Sevak, to find out what are the schemes available for women and what are the channels through which the information is disseminated.

### **Developmental Programmes Available**

182. As the programmes for women have been handled by various departments, it has been a Herculean task to make an inventory of all the programmes. The development programmes at the Centre have been of three categories: Economic Development Programmes, Social Development Programmes and Special Programmes for Women's Development. In all there are about 40 programmes.

183. It is now increasingly realized that apart from an integrated package of development inputs, a Development Information Dissemination System (DIDS), suited to the socio-cultural conditions of the target groups, is very critical. Mere provision of development programmes does not necessarily ensure equal participation capabilities among the target groups. So far, DIDS has played a negligible role.

### **Under-utilization of Multi Media**

184. A large number of development programmes have relied on print material (including leaflets, posters, brochures and other documents) and field publicity devices. The report of the Parliamentary Committee to probe into the communication gap found that the

bulk of the publicity budgets on anti-poverty programmes, for instance was spent of printed literature ignoring the fact of widespread illiteracy in the country. Many studies have pointed out that the lack of access to development information is just one step in a chain of deprivation which also includes lack of available support service and follow up efforts. Advertisements are given about the loans available but when approached, forms are not available and there is no one to explain the complicated form; thus the credibility of the Government is seriously in question.

185. Though the television and radio can be powerful media to disseminate information, in the context of mass poverty their use is limited.

186. As reported, excepting in the case of children's education (72%) and health (36%), awareness concerning other sectors of development was reported by very few women.

187. The media utilization in the two villages shows greater access to Radio. Television is available in fewer homes but newspapers are available in the least number of homes while the Radio at least seemed to expose them to ideas in women's development, television seemed in both the villages, to be primarily a medium of entertainment. Curiously enough, Krishi Darshan was listed as one of the popular programmes in Bindapur Village.

188. The time of the programme and access to radio/T.V. (since it was found that only men switched on the T.V.) seem to be factors for non-utilization of these media by women.

189. The use of other non-electronic media, particularly puppets, street plays, folk tales and other such traditional means of reaching out to the community seem hardly to be availed of. These have been mainly used by the grassroot organizations or sometimes by Extension Departments of Universities.

#### Socio-cultural Constraints

190. Another significant limitation of the development Agency's inability to reach out to the poor is due to their non-recognition of stratified heterogeneous rural social structure. The gram pradhan, for instance, coming from the upper castes or dominant political or economic group does not view alleviation of poverty as a serious concern and messages given through intermediary castes is not taken well by upper caste women.

191. Similarly, gender bias is not absent among the functionaries. They too consider women as inferior. The gram sevak who has to be constantly in touch with both the Government and the people, has been, by and large insensitive to the problems of women and will not go out of his way to reach out to them.

192. We have also been informed that the information about programmes is conveyed, at weekly meetings at the District/Taluka level. The Talatis, Sarpanchs and such other officials have in turn to give the message to the villagers, but the information hardly reaches the poor, lower caste women. The villagers, particularly women, need help in filling the complicated forms and have to rely on the Sarpanch. Many incidents have been reported when these officials have thrown away the forms. In a male dominated society, these officials do not oblige women immediately, and often, they have to make repeated trips, not always possible for a poor woman. In the end, she abandons the idea of taking any help.

193. Older uneducated, widows (above 35 years) residing in nuclear families and those belonging to farming occupations had low levels of awareness. On the other hand, educated married women between 18-35 years, residing in joint families and those belonging to agricultural labourers families and living in urbanised villages had high levels of awareness.

194. In the TRYSEM Programmes, though the avowed objective is to encourage the imparting of non-traditional skills to women, in reality this does not happen, largely because of gender-linked work divisions. In one of the districts of Gujarat, it was reported that in 1986 87

where about 55-TRYSEM courses were provided, the number of boys was 1,200 while that of girls was only 180. Further many girls were not given entrance to non-traditional courses like developing agricultural skills or carpentry.

195. Women seem to receive much of their information through male members of the family or neighbours. Development communication is thus taking place in family zones, or at best extended neighbourhood zones. The organized associations like the ones represented by the Village Pradhan or the Extension Workers representing a development programme have very little to contribute to development awareness. This is only possible if and when the Government official is sensitive and would like to reach to this sector. The reaching out strategy can also succeed when certain new structures are created to facilitate the process as was done in Rajasthan. The appointment of Sathins who are important opinion makers, has developed credibility, respect and self-confidence. But the BDO and Panchayat are suspicious and somewhat envious of the Pracheta as she ranks close to them in power.

### Observations

196. India is a vast and varied country and it is difficult to generalise from a few studies. However, there are a few features of communication which have been surfacing even in limited coverage.

197. Firstly, unless a concerted effort is made by development functionaries, information is not likely to reach those for whom it is meant. In the normal bureaucratic situation, and in the overall atmosphere of apathy, political wirepulling and corruption, it is unrealistic to expect a sarpanch or a gramsevak or a PHC worker to take special pains to reach out to poor women to make them aware of the developmental schemes available to them. Therefore, they rely on the print media which is normally useful, but radio could be used if more imaginative ways of disseminating information are devised.

198. Secondly, the stratified social structure has to be accepted and therefore, efforts must be made to reach out to different strata through different means.

199. Thirdly, the possibility of bringing women within developmental visibility seems to rest in arbitrating family-based or neighbourhood-based communication. The patriarchal society considers men as the right persons to be informed about the programmes. Having larger mobility and exposure, they come to know about the programmes much earlier and if they are favourable to particular programme, women will find it easier to avail of the schemes. Therefore, men have to be not only given information but they have to be pressed into relaying this to their women. The moot point here is whether there is sufficient communication between husband and wife, between older men and younger women. Moreover, if the men are not convinced, they may not communicate the message. In short, unless special efforts are made to reach out to the poor women, the informal channels are not likely to deliver the goods.

### Self Employed Women and Alternate Structures

200. The mainstream media—T.V. broadcasting, cinema or advertising have been indifferent to problems of the target women and even when projected, they are shown in a distorted or romanticised manner. Very few evidences could be cited where their hardships, working conditions, insecurity of work or miserable earnings have been portrayed with sensitivity and concern.

201. The formal system of education which is expected to create awareness among the students and generate social change, has also ignored the problems of poor women. So also, while the objective of adult education programmes is to provide skills to women of the

deprived sections and also empower them to improve their conditions, the limited review of the materials used in the adult education classes, indicates that we have miles to go to achieve this objective.

202. Similarly, though there are quite a few programmes which are meant to help poor women, little is in actual fact done to reach out to these women. Though it has been decided that 30 per cent of the beneficiaries of IRDP should be women, hardly 12 per cent are in fact, women. Thus, the development functionaries have not been able to encompass poor women.

203. In this situation of indifference towards the women of the unorganized sector, efforts are being made to create alternate structures in the media and in organizations which to some extent try to make these women visible, make them aware of the opportunities available, and provide access to resources.

#### Alternate Media

204. Alternate media is a continuous process and not an end in itself. In contrast to mainstream media it is loosely knit, lateral and less hierarchial in structure. Alternate media comes into existence when the mainstream media does not respond to the needs of the deprived people. For example it is not enough that the hardships and disabilities of poor women get highlighted, but it is also necessary to look upon them not as beneficiaries from a welfare point of view, but as persons with a democratic right of survival.

#### Alternate Print Media

205. We have noted that, by and large, women have been ignored or treated as sex objects. Attempts have been made by freelance journalists, activists, academicians and concerned staff to counteract these features.

206. In the last three years, journals like Economic and Political Weekly have started to bring out special numbers on women, twice a year, Seminar occasionally brings out focussed number on any burning issues, for example, Sati.

207. However, there are limits to working within the system, hence alternate journals, newsletters, pamphlets etc. are brought out. Further, with the growth of the women's movement in the late '70s, many feminist groups have realized the need for their own pieces. 'Manushi' occupies a very significant place in alternate print media. The media had so far been ignoring rural women's problems and their capacity to resist. It was further realized that it was necessary to understand and identify the issues around which women in different parts of the country were beginning to struggle, and to devise action by which they could be strengthened and supported. Manushi, for the last ten years, has been continuing to focus attention on poor women's issues.

208. Ansuya (a journal run by SEWA), Baija (a Marathi journal specifically concentrating on poor women), Apni Azadi Ke Liye, Awas Aurat Ki, Nari Mukti and other journals in regional languages have raised feminist issues, discussed the problems of poor women, and shown that poor illiterate women are capable of launching a creative struggle against injustice.

209. Some research organizations also produce journals and newsletters wherein information about women in the unorganized sector is disseminated and for the first time, attention has been drawn to the oppressive conditions of life of these women, as well as the fact of female-headed families.

#### Parallel Electronic Media

210. The importance of video as an alternate media has been greatly realised in recent years. Many grass root organizations, academic institutions and individuals are using video



cassettes to provide information to make the viewers aware of their rights and opportunities. SEWA Video, health groups like CHETNA, CENDIT (Centre for the Development of Instructional Technology), ASTHA, St. Xaviers communications group, are a few illustrative names which are involved in producing theme-based purposeful video programmes which could be shown to groups. Of course, the cost of the equipment, non-availability of power and other such constraints notwithstanding, video can be an effective medium for communications.

#### New Wave Films

211. The new wave films, unlike commercial formula films, have been trying to portray the problems of the working class and the rural poor more sensitively. For example, in the late seventies, Ankur, Akrosh, Manthan, Subah, Paar and Uski Roti, made poor women more visible.

212. But though these films are quite sensitive and realistic, they also fall in the trap of stereotyping the labouring woman. As Madhu and Ruth mention "In all these films, the viewer is told next to nothing about the woman's own perception of, or response to, the sexual advances" ... This tendency to present the poor, working women as literally and metaphorically dumb, reinforces the notion of her as a pitiable victim who would be a wife and a mother rather than a worker if the world were rightly and justly organized."<sup>18</sup>

213. A mention should also be made of some of the feminists who have been involved in film making. The Marathi film 'Bai' needs to be specially highlighted. Based on the life history of a dalit mother and daughter, this film has been used by women's groups to generate discussion on women's status and the trials of poor women.

#### Theatre

215. Theatre is a traditional medium and folk theatre, mime, street plays, jattras etc., have always been acceptable modes of entertainment and a vehicle for dissemination of information, ideas and values. Today, despite the invasion of cinema and other electronic audio visual devices, theatre continues to be a powerful medium.

215. Feminist groups have to an extent used street plays in mobilizing women and penetrating the middle class fortresses of values and pipe dreams. The Play Om Swaha is an important landmark in the development of street plays. Similarly, a Bombay-based group produced a marathi play called Mulgi Zali ho (a daughter is born), which has been translated into a number of languages.

216. Traditional folk media are also widely used by grassroot organizations to establish a direct link with the people.<sup>19</sup> Folk tunes with new lyrics that either expose gender discrimination or depict the plight of women, have been effectively used in mobilizing women, generating awareness and warming up group meetings.

217. The existing folk songs generally reinforce the stereotype image of women. Girls are expected to perform household chores as well as other agricultural activities. Adjustment and submissiveness are the dominant values in these songs.

218. One of the studies, experimented with modifying the content of the songs and evaluating their acceptance or rejection. For example, song which emphasised the importance of educating boys, was changed to emphasise the education of girls before they get married. Another song not only stressed the importance of education for girls but also spoke of the joy and pride of the grandparents about their beloved grand-daughter's success. Acceptance was found to be higher in the case of young, educated, unmarried girls. The older group showed great resistance, because of social pressure they had experienced.

219. Similarly, a study from Tamil Nadu is on effectiveness of the use of selected Folk Arts on Urban Adult Learners. 'Kummi' a folk dance is used to convey the message on child care, nutrition, family welfare, health and sanitation.

220. A significant gain was noticed in awareness and understanding through the use of these folk media.

#### Grassroots Organizations and Communication Experiments

21. Voluntary agencies have traditionally been working for the weaker sections of both rural and urban areas. However, the deprived sections of the society are too often treated as poor unfortunates who need to be raised from their down-trodden conditions by compassionate good samaritans. This is not to suggest that the protagonists of the 'welfare' approach have not been sensitive to the problems of the poor, or that they are not sincere. A basic difference between the new grassroots organizations and the earlier voluntary organizations is in their approach and objectives.

222. It is further observed that the problems of women of the unorganized sector have not attracted much attention from the mainstream organizations. Even organizations like Lijjat Papad or Mahila Mandals which give work to poor women share, the same attitude to workers in terms of wages, working conditions and security of job as other employers. Therefore, we propose to take illustrations of a few grassroot organizations which have tried different methods of organising the women and evolved a few techniques of reaching out.

223. The emergence of grassroot organizations, particularly in the seventies, was the result of disillusionment with Government programmes for the poor, apathy of the academic community towards grassroot problems, and indifference of political parties to women's issues. As U. Kalpagam avers, "It cannot be denied that the post-1975 period also witnessed a general proliferation of autonomous women's organizations, some nurtured and aided by foreign donor agencies. But there is no doubt that the alienation of the poor women from mainstream politics, administration and development is the cause for the proliferation of women's organisations. Their existence outside the framework of party politics is an indictment of the parties' insensitivities" (U. Kalpagam P. 3). The genre in which they have been working emphasises popular participation, non-hierarchical structures, flexibility and building up women's self-confidence and strength.

#### Models of Grassroot Organisations

224. Research and development organisations like Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) and Research Centre for Women's Studies (SNDT University) have been involved in working for the rural poor women. Their work includes teaching, research and action relating to women.

225. The CWDS has consciously opted for the role of catalyst in promoting research, action and policy debates in women's development issues. Time and again, there has been a transformation in the perspective, values and involvement, even the sense of identity of scholars, who subsequently begin to get involved in assisting the women to collectively work out solutions for their problems, using at this stage their own specific equipment, i.e., access to information of various kinds.<sup>20</sup> CWDS has used camps as an instrument for mobilization, consciousness raising identity expansion and training in new activities, responsibilities and skills. The major site of work is Bankura District in West Bengal. It also look up important activities like organizing workshops for Middle Level Administrators and Grassroot workers, to make the former particularly aware of the problems of poor women.

226. Similarly, the SNDT Women's University, through the Research Centre of

Women's Studies launched a rural development programme in Balsar district, Gujarat, with the specific aim of playing the role of a catalyst and an intermediary between the Government and poor women. It took up training programmes and also assisted in organizing poor women, with a view to providing academic inputs and thus not only making education relevant but also helping to build up strength and confidence among deprived women.

227. Voluntary organizations working with women in the informal sector have taken upon themselves the task of making these women's work visible. Before organizations like SEWA, Working Women's Forum (WWF), Annapurna and others came up, there was hardly any recognition of the contribution of these women to family survival and to the national economy.

228. Annapurna is a grassroots organization started in 1972 for a group of working women, involved in preparing meals (Khanavalis) for workers living alone in Bombay.<sup>21</sup> The main problem that these women faced was the high rate of interest charged by the local grocer when they bought provisions on credit.

229. Initially, the women were reluctant to form a group to get bank loans, primarily on account of fears of forming any type of relationship with the bank structures, as well as fear of regular Government inspections. They also feared of having to pay taxes as well having to adopt family planning compulsorily. All these fears were instilled in them by the local moneylenders/traders by floating rumours about problems involved in taking institutional loan. After much persuasion 14 women formed a group and were given loans by Bank of Baroda. Annapurna has now grown to cover 21 areas and can boast of having helped over 10,000 women to get loans through DRI schemes.

230. A different model of a grassroots organization is SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres) which has been founded with the express purpose of working with the poorest women in Bombay city. It has been primarily working with slum women and pavement dwellers.

231. SPARC has evolved with the collaboration of some 600 women and uses an innovative approach to get information on housing and land use. It was revealed that unless the women themselves take an interest in housing policies, credit sources etc., they would be made use of by vested interests.

232. As Srilatha Batliwala writes, "Participants are fully aware that it may not result in their getting a better place to live in immediately. What they have gained is a confidence, an expertise, a sense of hope and determination, a refusal to given in to lethargy and fatalism"<sup>24</sup>

233. The Pune Molkarin Sanghatana is an organization of domestic workers without any political affiliation. It was founded in February 14, 1980 after a continuous agitation of domestic workers who had united spontaneously into a 700 strong band to protest against the harassment of a maid by her employer.<sup>22</sup> A ten-day spontaneous strike of housemaids followed this incident and gave birth to the Molkarin Sanghatan. The events that followed also make a telling comment on how empowerment of women can be achieved through organizations.

234. During the agitation the Molkarins formulated their terms for better working condition and wages. Along with immediate demands certain proposals for long term policy for domestic workers were also chalked out.

235. But the isolated and scattered nature of domestic work makes it very difficult to enforce any of these demands. In spite of this, Molkarin Sanghatana, which presently has a membership of 1,000 out of a total of 30 thousand housemaids around Pune, has been able to successfully secure gains in wages and also get the demand for a bonus.

236. Another model of grassroot work is based on specific interest issue. Chetna in

Ahmedabad for instance, has been more concerned with training health and nutrition workers. It is also concerned with awareness generation, particularly in health issues.

237. Similarly, CENDIT as mentioned earlier, concentrates on producing audio-visuals to generate awareness about the plight of women. Mobile Creches organization's main concerns are health care and the education of children of migrant workers.<sup>23</sup>

238. The Tilonia experiment of SWRC started in 1972, is one more illustration of efforts at initiating community participation in problem identification and problem solving. It evolved structures which facilitated information dissemination and community participation.

239. A remarkable Government model among the rural poor is the Women's Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan. Here, the Prachetas and Sathins working as community workers at block and at village levels have been local women. Much thought out efforts respectively goes into their training and making them aware of the problems of women, which has resulted in bureaucrats working with vision and concern in a few districts at least. Also, the Nutrition Programmes of Government in Tamil Nadu has developed effective communications at the grassroots level.

240. India is a vast country, hence a variety of efforts by individuals and groups has been made to reach out to poor women, to bring them together, and to make them aware of their conditions. All these are flexible and diverse models, yet two specific features come out sharply. Most of them do not look at women from a welfare point of view, or want them to depend upon the organizers. Instead, they aim at creating confidence and skills so that the women may themselves take over the responsibility. Most of them try innovative devices to get the participation of poor women. Their objective is not merely to provide information about availability of resources, but to also initiate the important process of building up self-confidence and increasing social awareness.

#### Communication Techniques Used by the Grassroot Organizations

241. It is quite clear that when the objective is to get maximum participation of women, generate flow of information from them to the policy makers and finally make them capable of running the organization, the techniques have to be more flexible, involving, innovative and participatory. Information has not merely to be conveyed but also generated.

242. The most common technique of achieving this is oral Meeting women (person to person contact), talking to them, building up mutual trust. Efforts are made to build up the credibility of the workers of the organization and initiate the process of involving the poor women in various programmes.

243. The use of posters, flash cards, slogans and exhibitions has been another method of communication. Special exhibitions organized around specific themes, helps in generating awareness. Some groups use puppets for communicating. A very creative and yet interesting use is made of role plays and drama, particularly during workshops.

244. About 100 anganwadi workers took part in the training programme for anganwadi workers in Dalman block of Rai Bareli district in U.P. The entire workshop was organized in such a way as to get the maximum initiative and participation of women in the collection of riddles, rhymes, songs and games.

245. Sathins hold 'jajam' meetings regularly to discuss their problems. They use plays in training to communicate the meaning of development, the functioning of certain kinds of cooperatives and the nexus that deprives the rural poor. A story about a struggle for minimum and equal wages for men and women was transformed into a play which showed the various operations, digging, relaying, carrying—involved in the work. This made the lives and struggles of women elsewhere in India, part of their own collective memory.

246. Holding shibirs', 'sammelans' of their members is the most common method used by these organisations. In short, when the objective is to reach the target group, various devices can be used.

### Observations

247. This section delineated the role of alternate structures in communication. Committed individuals and groups are leaving no stone unturned to get the message to the concerned persons. For them, the poor women are not invisible nor are they looked upon from any political motive. The problem facing alternate media or organizations is how best to communicate and how effectively to bring about solidarity.

In spite of their efforts, these grassroot organizations face quite a few problems:

These organizations are few, compared to the vast number of poor women. Hence they have their own small areas of operation, and are not able to encompass larger regions.

The creation and use of alternate media needs not only creative and innovative insights, but also commitment to work with poor women.

248. The alternate media will not be able to generate awareness by themselves. Special efforts to interpret serials, films and slide shows have to be made, by playing an interventionist role.

249. Even the best of the intentions to generate an atmosphere of equality cannot be easily overcome, the thousands of years of social distance perpetrated by caste, class, community and gender differences. For example, a Brahmin woman communicator is able to get across to many other women, but if the communicator is a Harijan, she is debarred from upper caste homes. Similarly, age and marital status are also significant variables influencing communication.

250. The cost involved in using the media or organizing meetings frequently has also to be considered.

251. Similarly the poor woman has so little free time, that frequent and lengthy meetings may not always be possible. These are some of the limitations; of course, it would not be wrong to say that if alternate structures were not available, there would have been little communication with these target women, at all.

### Conclusion

252. The foregoing review has in various ways indicated that the mainstream media, the educational system and the policy makers have hardly considered the contribution of overwhelmingly large numbers of women in the unorganised sector. The fact that these women are often the sole bread-winner for whom work is not a transient phenomenon in their life but a permanent necessity is ignored. Hard back-breaking hours of toil are caricaturised into colourful, seemingly effortless tasks. The working woman is depicted through a distorting mirror. Maid servants are always grumbling, demanding, gossiping, fisherwomen are always quarrelsome and sexy; a construction worker with heavy load on her head transforms into a smiling and scantily-dressed woman. For advertisers, machines and gadgets are considered to liberate women (How many women can afford them is a moot question) from grumbling maid servants and not from house-work. Images, especially visual ones, influence people both at a conscious and subconscious level. Because they reflect a distorted and biased perception of reality, such images create and also reinforce a reality which in turn feeds the image.

253. Further, the reality of severe exploitation of poor self-employed women by the middlemen (which has been time and again pointed out by numerous studies), bureaucratic cobwebs of rules and conditions, harassment by municipal authorities and police in the name

of law and order, are not depicted by the media. The entire notion of women's work as shown by the electronic or print media, suggests that she is doing a wifely/daughterly/motherly duty when she is working. That the work which she does is contributing significantly to the survival of the family is a fact that rarely surfaces.

254. The prevalent 'welfare' approach of the policy makers considers poor women as targets and beneficiaries, but not as participants in the development process. Development communication believes that information is not an unilateral phenomenon, but a two-way process; it also stresses that they have not to be talked to in a benevolent manner, but instead their experiences have to be considered while formulating programmes and strategies.

255. One of the important findings of the review of communication agencies, has been that though radio has been effective as a supplier of information, much of the actual information transmission is done through inter-personal communication, where family members, village elders and opinion leaders play a crucial role. Some of the studies have also shown that in a society where oral communication is still predominant, the caste barriers, or norms regarding husband wife relationships become serious constraints to access to information. The upper castes having more access to powers that be, do not transmit the same to lower caste women; in a situation where, for centuries, male family members are told that women should only be told whatever it is worth their knowing, it is difficult to expect them to transfer all information, with regard to say, milk prices in the cooperative or TYRSEM programmes of training in non-traditional skills, to women. Selectivity in information transfer is a likely outcome.

256. On the other hand, it has been noticed that whenever a concerted effort is made to reach out to the poor women, the results have been positive. As mentioned in the tour report of the Commission it has been mentioned during the country wide tour, that whenever women have been organised into a worker's union or cooperative society or Mahila Mandal or have had some interaction with some development project, they seem to have a better idea of their rights as well as about the laws that existed to protect them. In Rajasthan for instance, where the women's development project is working, there is a marked difference in the knowledge about agriculture extension work. They even know the hazards of zinc pollution from the zinc plant which is destroying their crops and their health.

257. But grass-roots organisations are not always success stories. A woman may help her puppeteer husband in stitching, organizing, etc., but she will not travel with him for performances. Women puppeteers, initially have to bear the criticism of the community. Further, the available communication is not always of information on aids and facilities available, but it is also often protest communication where slogans, posters, exhibitions and songs convey the message of protesting against oppression and exploitation. Hence, grass-root organisations become threats to the status quo, and treated like a law and order problem.

258. Finally, it has to be noted that communication takes place in a society which is based on private ownerships of the means of production, with profit as a motive of production and saleability as a major criterion of the worth of any product. In this context, poor women's access to information may not immediately lead to an improvement of their conditions of life, nor will their realistic portrayal society sensitive to their problems. However, visibility is the first step towards awareness and action.

259. Identification of the forms of communication which help interaction, reveals that both mainstream and informal forms of communication play an effective role in image-building, information transfer. However, due to illiteracy and poverty, cinema and Television are considered luxury items, newspapers and journals are of very little use, and hence

communication is only effective through informal networks and oral channels.

260. In the context of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

#### Policy

(1) Working women in the unorganised sector ought to be looked upon as workers and not merely as performing wifely or daughterly duties. Their being major earners and producers and not merely consumers ought to be projected. Unless they are perceived as workers, their rights will not be recognised.

(2) The imperative need today is to formulate a clear communication policy stating its objectives; how it plans to achieve its objectives, and what is the time period and institutional structures in which the objectives are to be realized.

#### For all Media

(1) All the groups which are concerned with the media and/or connected with planning and dissemination should structurally integrate the participation of socially aware persons into their work. This will enable the planning group to be aware of the gender perspective and to women's issues. The media monitoring unit should try to help the media to orient themselves to the interest, concerns and development of women in the unorganised sector.

(2) Frequent workshops may be organised for media persons focussing generally on women's problems, and specifically on the problems of women in the unorganised sector. Further, such workshops should also publicize the successful communication experiments carried out in the media, so as to help others in developing and using such strategies.

This would further help in looking at the poor women not as mere objects to be acted upon, but equal partners in creatively disseminating information.

(3) Innovative efforts to communicate should be encouraged. If possible, some percentage allocation may be reserved for such experiments, so that efforts are not hampered by lack of funds.

(4) Considering the context of poverty and unemployment the over-emphasis on electronic media ought to be discouraged. Instead, other forms of interactions such as fairs, shibirs, health camps, jathas can be organized.

(5) All the media channels, both public sector and private, sector, should take serious note of the Seventh Plan directive that themes which glamorise conspicuous consumption should not be projected. Advertisements displaying women as sex symbols and using them for sales promotion, should be seriously dealt with. It is not enough to control pornography through legislative enactments; it is equally necessary not to convey sex-linked division of labour or female stereotypes. More vigorous policy implementation is called for.

(6) The public sector media should make deliberate attempts to not only project the problems of poor women, but should make sure that their work conveys neither conflicting role models nor derogatory references to women's work.

(7) To improve content and coverage, coordinated efforts for increased interaction between NGOs, women's social action groups, research organizations, institutes of mass communication and media personnel be developed. There is a need to evolve a network to monitor the projection of women and evolve a code of ethics with regard to the presentation of women in the media.

#### Recommendation for Print Media

(1) It is recommended that more coverage be given to poor women's lives and their problems. Care must be taken to avoid sexist biases in the news coverage. A more sensitive, sympathetic reporting is called for with regard to this category of women.

(2) A well-defined and adequately funded programme of encouraging the publication of data, problems, schemes to help women and also to make them aware of their rights, ought to be printed in regional languages in a readable style. The use of sophisticated concepts and complicated presentations ought to be avoided.

#### Recommendations for Radio and Doordarshan

(1) While accepting the fact that television is resorting to sponsored programmes, commercial cinema songs and interviews and largely mainstream films which reinforce stereo-types of women, it is recommended that more vigilance be applied in selecting programmes. Often, seemingly 'women-oriented' programmes are in reality dubious interpretations of the women's question.

(2) Video can be used as a consciousness raising tool by telecasting simple programmes which give useful information and guidelines. Further, appreciating the power of songs sung in traditional tunes but having feminist content, Doordarshan should collaborate with activists in collecting such songs and prepare video cassettes to be played in the programmes like Ghar Bahar, Krishi Darshan, etc.

(3) Women's programmes ought not to be treated as 'Purdah Hour', either by Doordarshan or by radio. Information about problems of women in the unorganised sector is necessary for both men and women.

(4) The findings of the Commission during its tours observed that radio is more popular than television with women and comparatively more easily accessible. However, it is very necessary to reschedule the programme timings. Only those women who are not working can listen to the radio in the afternoon. Most of the women workers would prefer relevant programmes late in the evening.

(5) In view of the proposed expansion of television and radio, efforts must be made to include poor women in planning. More community sets must be made available and more group viewing be facilitated, so that these women get the benefit of reaching to the media.

(6) Given the hierarchy of programmes in the present Doordarshan and radio structures, it is recommended that the depiction of problems of vast majority be given higher priority. Further, more facilities should be accorded to make programmes which are not unimaginative and studio bound.

(7) Village Mahila Mandals should be provided with a transistor set and tape recorder, for their own use. Producers largely belong to the middle and upper classes and have limited notions of the problems of their target audience. They need to be made aware of these women and their problems, so as to portray them sensitively. Also, women themselves should be encouraged and trained to use the equipments to make their own programmes.<sup>59</sup>

#### Recommendations for Cinema

(1) It is very frustrating to note that commercial cinema does not project self-employed women realistically. On the contrary, it gives a false idea about their lives and never considers work as a necessity for women. Depiction of poverty is used more as a spring board to sentimentalize the role of the hero or the mother. Rape scenes are included for titilating the audience rather than to depict the vulnerability of these women. It is recommended that more strict control on the production of such films be used. Dehumanizing portrayals must be condemned.

(2) Regional language films have, on quite a few occasions, depicted the problems of poor women sympathetically and with understanding. Such films should be dubbed in Hindi and other languages so that the message may reach a wider audience.



(3) Innovative film producers should be given special encouragement, not merely for producing but also helping in distribution.

#### Recommendations for Department of Audio Visual Publicity (DAVP)

(1) DAVP's poor performance is very sad. Doordarshan's posters, exhibitions and short films are not generally imaginative, they are very directly diadectic, and condescending; they suggest that poor men and women are foolish and have to be constantly given advice. It is recommended that more sensitivity be exhibited in conveying messages, whether it is of Family Planning or of the use of mechanised equipment in agriculture or of the age of marriage.

(2) Field publicity devices have to be used judiciously in a society where most of the population is illiterate. Experience in legal literacy has shown that print materials can be used for para-legal workers or extension workers but not for the dissemination of information to rural masses.

(3) In order to be effective, the Development Information Dissemination system should take following steps:

(4) A total training/orientation/re-training plan should be formulated for each development programme for women and wherever possible, for a common cluster of development programmes for women, incorporation therein the hierarchy of functionaries, diverse groups of beneficiaries/participants, and training methodologies with the specific objective of developing knowledge, attitudes and practice of various development programmes for women. Networking among governmental and non-governmental organisations and educational institutions should be made part of the training plan, with a view to making optimum use of existing resources. Combined training programmes at the block level, comprising of local officials in the development programme representatives of non-governmental organizations, village level functionaries, and people's representatives at the village level would be helpful in creating a climate for better utilization of communication channels for development programmes. The training programmes should include, among other aspects, an element of disensitization of biases against the poor.

(5) A well-coordinated communication strategy could be evolved by an integrated group, comprising of Block level extension officials, bank officials, health officials and District Rural Development Agency officials for use of oral, visual and audiovisual methods of communication for development programmes.

(6) The use of communication media in aid of a process of raising community participation for that matter, participation by self-employed women, in development programmes could be viewed in terms wider than mere information dissemination exercises. Most development programmes which visualize the poor self-employed women as the potential beneficiary, or one of the intended target groups, would need to accord a broader orientation to communication support systems. Communication support systems for the development programmes must reach the intended beneficiaries in terms of their own communication matrix and in a manner which provides a comprehensive effect, access to information, skills in using the information, and, ability to articulate feedback. This may ultimately make the policy formulation processes much more meaningful.

#### Recommendations for Education System (both Formal and Informal)

(1) In order to implement the spirit of the new Education Policy, the textbooks and curricula will need complete overhauling. The invisibility of the women of the unorganised sector in text-books is a sad commentary on our education system. It is strongly recommended that text-books be rewritten so as to eliminate invisibility of women and sexism

in the portrayal of their lives.

(2) Adult education primers which are meant to be utilized primarily by poor women, need to be rewritten, as they do not in any way project the issues faced by these women nor do they generate self-confidence or courage.

#### Recommendations with Regard to Government Functionaries

(1) The findings point out that dissemination of information from the Government to the people is highly unsatisfactory. Not only is the top down approach counter-productive, but many a times the functionaries are unaware of the work and problems of women in the unorganised sector. It is recommended therefore, that more interface situations with the activists and the women in unorganised sector be organised. Just as steps were taken to include women's views in the training for officials, officers, from the collector down to the gram sevak, must be exposed to the real situation of poor women and their needs.

(2) Reaching out to women cannot be an automatic process. But it has been found that whenever efforts have been made, the message does reach. Implementation is always difficult and we recommend therefore that, considering the social set up in rural areas, efforts must be made to involve gram sevikas and mukhya sevikas in the task of reaching out to women.

#### Recommendations for Grassroot Organisations

(1) Considering the effectiveness of the grassroot organizations in reaching poor women, more support both financial and in facility, should be given to these organizations.

(2) The jatra, kriti, mahila mela should be encouraged as forms and communication where women not only get exposure, but also forum for self-expression.

(3) It has been found that the use of multi-media has been functional. Hence it is recommended that groups be encouraged to use both folk and highly sophisticated electronic media. The creative use of puppets, story telling, songs with new content, role plays and all other devices of participatory functioning be used and also documented, both in print and visual forms so that other groups may learn from the experience. In a poor country like ours, it would be wasteful expenditure for every group to start on a clean slate. Replication and emulation must be encouraged. This is not to deny the role of regional specificities. The detailed write up of the processes involved in participatory training prepared, for instance, by the Institute of Development Studies, Rajasthan is very useful. This should be provided in regional languages so that they could reach out to more women.

(4) Though alternative structures have been more effective in their understanding, reaching out and getting the participation of poor women, they are just a few drops in an ocean of invisibility. Hence it is recommended that wherever possible, mainstream media and organisations be used. This would not only be helpful in wider coverage but will hopefully bridge the gap between the two.

(5) . To get a more authentic picture of the exposure and use of the media, more research needs to be done on audience, readers and viewers.

# 8

## ON ORGANISING

**E**arlier we had tongues but could not speak. We had feet but could not walk. Now... we have got the strength to speak and to walk"<sup>1</sup>(Malan Devi, during the struggle for land in Bodhaya).

2. Today we are witnessing the gradual rise of a movement of self employed women. Poor women are organising on issues, asserting themselves, articulating their needs and bringing themselves to the forefront of our political consciousness. Organisations of self employed women including unions, voluntary organisations and cooperatives have multiplied and are spreading across the nation. As these organisations grow and spread, as they become more articulate, as they link with each other to highlight common issues, so the movement snowballs and emerges into consciousness. We are presently at the beginning of the growth of this movement. Many of us will be privileged to see in the future a full-scale movement of self employed women which will transform the face of our society.

3. The present day movement has only recently become a self-conscious movement of self employed women. However, it has been possible only because of many earlier movements and attempts to organise by those women. There is very little data about women in earlier movements. What little documentation is available indicates that poor women did indeed play an important role in earlier movements. These earlier organising attempts were of two types—participation of poor women within a larger movement such as the Nationalist Movement, and the Labour Movement, or localised struggles of poor women over specific issues. In this section we will first explore the participation of poor women—general movements and then at their issue-based struggles.

### **Participation of poor women within larger movements**

4. *The Nationalist movement* The nationalist movement started to become a mass

movement with the advent of Gandhi in 1915. As the movement expanded to draw in the poor masses, the issues of self-employed women began to be addressed for the first time. Khadi was perhaps the first issue which reached the needs of poor women.

"Gandhi's relentless propaganda in favour of Charkha spinning and weaving of Khadi and designed to bring the spirit of nationalism and freedom in every home, even in the most remote village—I swear by this form of swadeshi, because through it I can provide work to the semi-starved, semi-employed women of India with, the destruction of India's village craft, especially the textile industry, due to the impact of colonialism, millions of women lost their means of subsistence. They responded to Gandhi's appeal."<sup>2</sup>

5. Similarly

"The salt Satyagrah marked a new high watermark of women's participation in the movement..... On the famous Dandi March through the village of Gujarat, Gandhi originally started off with 79 satyagrahis.....thousands of people walking with Gandhi. Among them were many women. Some of them were certainly from the cities but a majority were ordinary village women."<sup>3</sup>

6. Poor women were also very active in the anti-alcohol campaign, Gandhi's struggle for prohibition reflected the deep concern of self-employed women for the safety of their homes.

7. However when the movement achieved its objective and India became independent, there was no longer any need for agitation and civil disobedience. Now a new nation had to be governed, to be developed; self employed women were not seen as having any role in this new task and their issues were no longer given any importance. The participation of poor women declined and the spirit generated by them during the nationalist movement, faded away.

### **The Labour Movement.**

8. The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century saw a growth of industrialisation in the country. The industries were built up by poor men and women who laboured under which the self employed labour works today. Slowly these industrial workers began to organise. At first there were spontaneous strikes and other organising attempts. These attempts gathered momentum, and by 1920 there was a fast-growing labour movement, with workers taking an active part in the process of organising. The struggles of the jute workers in Bengal, textile workers in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Coimbatore, the plantation workers in the North East and the coir workers in Travancore all involved the active participation of women workers.

"The textile strike in Bombay in 1939, which I witnessed, was something to remember for the militancy of the women workers. They picketed the gates of the mills early before 6.00 a.m. and distributed hand bills, enrolled thousands of workers, spoke at meetings. They beat the strike breakers wherever they found anyone trying to enter the mills."<sup>4</sup>

9. As the trade union movement became stronger, the workers became more organised and wrested considerable concessions for themselves. They acquired skills and education, their living condition improved, as did their working conditions. However poor working women gained little if anything at all. As the trade unions became politically powerful, the participation of women decreased not only within the trade unions but within the organised workforce itself. Furthermore the trade unions found it comfortable to operate only within the organised sector. They did not attempt to reach out to the mass of poor working women in the unorganised sector. Thus, the very working women whose militancy had made a success of

the labour movement, ended up being excluded from the movement. It is only after 1975 and the rise of the women's movement, that the labour movement has very slowly begun to try and re-organise these women.

### **The Women's Movement**

10. The first stirrings of the movement for reform of women's status can be seen in the 19th century stretching into the 20th century. These included the socio-religious reform movements, notably the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthna Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Muslim Reform movement and the like. However,

"The general impact of all these movements has been most pronounced on the urban middle class. Some of the ideas projected by them, namely disapproval of child marriage and ill-treatment of widows, education and better treatment of women within the family, ensuring them a position of greater dignity, have become part of the general cultural heritage of this sector of India's society. Being elitist in character and limited in approach, they have never tried a proper investigation of the problems that weighed on women outside the middle class."<sup>5</sup>

11. These reform movements did not include the self employed within their purview.

12. Poor women first began to be drawn into a women's reform movement with the advent of Gandhi and the nationalist movement. As the nationalist movement expanded to draw in both women as well as the poor masses in general, the issues of self employed women began to be addressed for the first time. The post independence period saw a decline in the participation of poor women in women's issues. The largest and most influential women's organisation, the All India Women's Conference, did not actively take up the issue of self employed women. They focussed more on the passing and implementation of laws concerning child marriage, widow marriage, equal rights within marriage, and the right of



Individually she is vulnerable, in togetherness she seeks strength.

women to inherit property. The participation of poor women in the women's movement dropped sharply. Mahila Samitis, Mahila Mandals and Mahila Samajams were formed all over the country during the fervour of the nationalist movement. After independence these local women's groups remained as ongoing organisations but the participation of poor women in them declined, as did the militancy of the group itself.

13. In Assam for example, Mahila Samitis have their beginnings in the wake of the national movement which did make an impact on the socio-political life of Assamese women in the first half of the century, because of its nationalistic appeal. considerable number of women from towns and villages came out of their houses during this phase to fight for freedom and assist people in need.

14. It was in 1962 that the state level apex body and Mahila Samiti was formed under the name of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti.

15. The effort has resulted in the formation of district Mahila Samitis under which comes the primary (village) Mahila Samitis. The objectives of these organisations include matters like mass education, social reforms, maternity and child welfare besides developing weaving and village industries.

16. While the continued presence of Mahila Samitis all over Assam does contribute to women's development in general, there is no rigorous effort on the part of the apex and district members to involve rural women in major issues and neither are they able to reach down the village women in assisting them with practical problems because of feeble institutional support and acute problems in communication. We see this is in the case of some Mahila Samitis like the Dibrugarh District Mahila Samiti where most of the 300 primary samities under it are dwindling while 150 are being kept alive in the hope of getting subsidised yarn from the government."<sup>6</sup>

17. In 1974 the Report of Committee on the status of women in India was released. The report gave a lot of prominence of the position of 'unorganized workers' as well as the status of poor women in with regard to education, politics and the law. Thus the report highlighted the role and problems of the self employed women. This report followed by the International Women's Year, 1975, saw a sudden growth and a new turn in the women's movement in India.

18. Groups with a distinctly feminist perspective were formed and feminist theories and ideas began to permeate the jargon of social reform. The new groups included urban middle class groups such as Forum Against Rape in Bombay, Progressive Organisation of Women in Hyderabad, as well as self employed women's groups such as SEWA and WWF. As the women's movement has grown, it has begun to realise that a genuine movement must project and concentrate on issues that involve the masses of women. Consequently there has been an attempt to organise poor working women to project the issues that affect the most, such as deforestation unequal wages and indebtedness.

### **Women within other struggles after 1975.**

19. The rise of the women's movement in the 1970s saw an increasing awareness of the importance of women's participation. Although, as we have seen, women participated with fervour and militancy in struggles and social movements, yet their role had not been fully appreciated. There was little documentation of their achievements, they could not reach positions of importance and after the movement achieved its goals, their participation rapidly declined.

20 After the 1970s, women's role in general struggles began to be not only noticed but encouraged. There emerged a new breed of women activists who struggle within the larger

struggle for women's issues, for equality and leadership.

20. This "struggle within a struggle" is graphically described by Nalini Nayak, an activist from Kerala who played an important role in the Fisherpeoples' struggle.

21. Nalini Nayak in her thoughtful book "struggle within the Struggle", describes how within the larger struggle for fisher peoples' rights, women have asserted themselves to play an important role.

"It must be mentioned here that it was the women who first mobilised and went out on demonstrations and representations to the government before the men, so much so that in the following years, when the large fish workers' struggle took place, women were in the forefront—not only in the forefront of the struggle but in the organising of actual task as well. It is true that they were obliged to play also the service roles but it was obvious that militancy of the struggle was a result of their active and committed participation.

22. It is interesting to see how minimum successes lead them into further struggles against exploitative unjust market taxes, lack of proper facilities in the markets, lack of facilities at the local government hospitals, absence of teachers at the local government schools etc. And so the movement evolves not without its difficulties."<sup>7</sup>

23. Gail Omvedt, a rural activist and researcher, described a similar militant role for women in peasant struggle.

"The role of women in peasant struggles—more specifically in poor peasant and agricultural labourer organising was brought home to me in visits to the state of Maharashtra in Western India in the summer of 1973. In this area there had been a major rural upsurge between 1970 and 1973 in years of famine; time and again male organisers of various left parties testified to the fact that women were the most militant. Women, they said, were in the forefront of marches, the first to break through police lines and fight, the most tenacious in negotiations, the inventors of new forms of struggle such as blocking of traffic on roads. This awareness of women as a force was leading to a new consciousness of the specific problems of women's oppression along with class oppression."<sup>8</sup>

24. Even the labour movement has begun to force trade unions take women's participation seriously. Ilina Sen, an activist in the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, describes the role of women in her union.

25. "CMSS is a trade union of mine workers in Dalli—Rajhara an iron ore mining town in Madhya Pradesh.

26. The CMSS fought its first major battles on the issues of bonus and housing allowance for the contractual workers. Strong pressure exerted by the union has also held at bay the management's plans to mechanise the manual mines, as it was foreseen that this would lead to massive retrenchment of the manual mine workers. CMSS has been unique among trade unions in its attempts to go beyond mere bread and butter issues, it led a successful anti-alcoholism campaign among the workers. In CMSS women participated in all union struggles and activities. They played a major role in the first strike of 1977, as well as in the 1981 movement to secure the release of union leaders arrested under the National Security Act. Women are elected union office bearers from the mines in equal proportion of their numbers. Women played a leading role in the anti-alcoholism campaign. In propagating the philosophy of this campaign, in organising 'mohalla' (residential) committees for the detection and punishing of offenders, women were much more active than men. Women related to this campaign especially because alcoholism was easily seen to be related to wife beating and the whole range of women's oppression. In addition, with men drinking away their earnings, the burden of sustaining

the household fell on the women. Side by side with the support of the entire union, fought successfully for the achievement of maternity benefits in accordance with constitutional and labour laws.”<sup>9</sup>

27. CMSS was a union which achieved a genuine participation of poor women within its activities, but other unions too began after 1979 to realise the importance of organising poor women. On the whole, this realisation was from topdown. And it was first the trade union federations—CITU, HMS, INTUC, AITUC, BMC—which formed ‘women’s wings’. At first, these wings were mere tokenism, but gradually a women’s force began to emerge from below and now some of these wings genuinely organise poor women. Similarly political parties began to realise the importance of the poor female electorate and they too started women’s wings.

### **Localised, Issue-based Movements**

28. Poor women have participated not only in general movements such as the labour movement, and the nationalist movement, but also in movements on specific issues which particularly affected them. Time and again women in different parts of the country have agitated against the easy availability of liquor, against threats to their employment and even against foreign rule.

“Manipur is a state where women have been especially active. The trail that women have blazed in popular movements in Manipur in the present century is novel, and unprecedented. For example—in 1904, forced labour was sought to be introduced in Manipur. Before the men could comply, women in Imphal demonstrated violently against the proposed re-introduction of forced labour. The demonstrators were “market-women” who succeeded in foiling the agent’s bid to use compulsory services of the male population. Again in 1925, Manipuri women agitated collectively against enhancement of the water tax. They took out a procession in Imphal and organised noisy demonstrations near the durbar offices. The most dramatic of the women’s agitations in Manipur was the Nupi Lan, or ‘Women’s War’ launched in 1939. The poor women rice traders felt threatened by the large Marwari traders who had, encouraged by the British cornered a large share of the rice was destroyed by inclement weather, and there was unrest in the foodgrains market and tried to prevent rice-laden bullock-carts and lorries from leaving Imphal for destinations outside the state. About 2000 women shouted slogans outside the darbar office where an emergency meeting was being held to consider the deteriorating situation in the supply of rice. Characteristically, the women, whose numbers had welled to 4,000 confined the political Agent Civil Surgeons and some other officers to the telegraphic office for several hours in an original enactment of the modern day gherao...The tense atmosphere outside the telegraph office in Imphal on 12th December, 1939 echoed to nationalist/feminist cries, Bande Mataram and Manipur Matajiki Jai. In order to disperse the thinking crowd, mounted troops charged at the women. The armed troops carried bayonets and it is reported that 21 women were seriously injured, several with bayonet wounds. The gherao lasted well past midnight. This incident has since gone down in public memory on the day of the “Bayonet Charge” Rice export was finally banned on 13 December, 1939”<sup>10</sup>

29. The 1970s saw further rise of such localised struggle where women organised around specific issue.

“At the end of 1973 for example, women from several left parties—including Mrinal Gore, a Socialist leader who had toured the rural areas, Ahilya Rangnekar, a CPI (M) leader who had worked among tribal women and women powerloom workers in small town areas as well as in her home base of Bombay—joined together to form the United



Women's Anti-Price Rise Front. The Anti-Price Rise Front sought to mobilize working women and housewives of the cities against inflation. Marches of up to 10-20,000 women were organised in Bombay, often brandishing traditional symbols such as the thali (plate) or latha (rolling pin). Gherao actions of smaller groups, 30-40 women, were staged, focusing on state ministers and big capitalists associated with high-price consumer products. The Anti-Price Rise Front spread to other cities and towns in Maharashtra and other State in India, but the Bombay organisation remained the strongest."<sup>11</sup>

30. The Chikko Andolan—the movement to hug trees—is probably the world's most well-known grassroots ecodevelopment movement.

"The movement was born one morning in March, 1973 in the remote hill town of Gopeshwar in Chamoli District, where representatives from a sports goods factory came to cut down 10 ash trees, the villagers courteously told them to do so. When the contractors persisted, they hit upon the idea and hugging the earmarked trees. The villages have also seen and resent the manner in which successive governments—beginning with the British—have taken away their forest wealth and turned it into a resource bank for distant urban markets. Even for minor forest produce, and articles of daily necessity like firewood, the local people have been forced to become thieves in their own homeland. Slowly, the entire ecology of the region has changed. The local people prefer the broad-leaved oak. But with the demands of the industrial culture increasing, oak forests have been destroyed and replaced extensively by the chirpine. Today when the local villages want to grow oak wood to make ploughs, they are allotted pine trees, whose wood is useless for this purpose.

31 The Chipko movement reached its climax in 1974, when the women of village Reni, some 65 km from Joshimath, got involved in a dramatic way. One day, when their men were away in Joshimath protesting against the auctioning of a forest neighbouring Reni, the contractor arrived at the village to begin felling trees. Taking this as an opportune moment, undaunted by the number of men or their axes, the women of Reni, led by Gaura Devi, an illiterate woman of 50, barred the path to the forest which went through the village. As the women stood there, they sang: "This forest is our mothers' home, we will protect it with all our might."

32. The non-violent, action oriented Chipko movement has greatly helped to unite the people and focus attention on the mismanagement of forest resources."<sup>12</sup>

33. These localised, issue-based movements have revealed that poor women have the ability to mobilise and organize for change. It reveals that they understand the issues that affect them, and under the right circumstance can unite in a militant way to change them. However, the agitations described above have been unsustainable. When the organising is for a particular issue only and at a particular place only, then although the movement may be strong at a certain time, it slowly dies away and does not give rise to an ongoing organisation, which would take up one issue after another and which would gradually include many different occupations within its fold. These short localised struggles reveal a potential but do not crystallize into a movement.

34. Some interesting exceptions are organizations which have traditionally developed to accommodate the needs of self employed women and sustain even to the present day as viable women's groups. Small women's mutual credit societies and chit funds for example are found in abundance all over the country.

35 In Assam, there are examples of women traditionally organising for collective self-help around economic issues.

36. Traditional collective are identified with Plains Tribal women such as also Bado

Kachari, Karbi and Mishing Communities. These collectives evolve around economic issues only. To give an example of form of organising, women of Plains Tribal villages run paddy banks in that young women from several households stock substantial amount of grain together from their share which is then open to loan. Any needy person can borrow an amount of grain from these banks with which she gets six months to repay the loan, along with an interest of half the amount that she borrows. This way the paddy bank swells and women claim their share whenever the occasion arises. Even in traditional collectives where several women weave for the village, about 40% of the total income collected is kept aside for the organisation. The money is often spent on yarn for weaving. It may be added that there is a strong tradition of female entrepreneurship in context of weaving in Assam. In fact, village economy functions largely in women and entrepreneurship."<sup>13</sup>

37. Left parties, especially the marxists were involved in organising the masses of rural poor/women in all the three major types of movements, Labour movement (jute and textile Labour) Nationalist Movement, localised issue-based movements (anti-price-rise) and other major struggles in '70s (peasants' movement). It was often the Militancy of the leftists which led to an involvement of the poor with other movements. This was true in the labour movements as well as the involvement of poor women.

38. The first women's organisation amongst the left parties—The National Federation of Indian Women was formed in 1954 by the CPI. The Federation aimed at "raising political and social awareness of women to fight for social justice and transformation which alone can release them from their present restricted positions in society. Their constructive programmes include mainly literacy but they have been active in mobilising women's protest against all types of injustice and social evils. They have been emphatic in condemning the ill-treatment and exploitation of Harijan women and women workers. The protests by women in different parts of the country against rising prices, hoardings, adulteration and corruption were organised as a result of an appeal from the National Federation of Indian Women."<sup>14</sup>

39. Although the National Federation of Indian Women still remains the mass front of CPI, it was inactive for years. Marxist and regionally based communist/Marxist organisations (eg. Lal Nishan Party of Maharashtra) also concentrated on class organising. But this kind of mass organizing brought significant change in the attitudes and orientation of many Communists in the last few years. Gail Omvedt attributes this change and rise of non leftled women's organisation to role of rural women in rural upsurge.

40. Since 1969 this rural upsurge has taken three main forms:

- (i) Armed struggle, most often under Naxalite leadership among indebted poor tribal peasants in border regions, on West Bengal ('68-'69), Bihar ('68-'69) and Andhra Pradesh ('78-'79) and parts of Kerala;
- (ii) Intensive, mass union-type organizing of agricultural labourers over demands for wages and sometimes land has occurred in localised plains areas most often involving the low-caste labourers of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, Ahmednagar and Dhulia district of Maharashtra. This type of organizing which has most consistently brought women's issues forward. The leadership in this type of organizing has come primarily from the established parliamentary communist parties, but more recently non-parliamentary groups—communists, independent Marxists, and radicalised tribal leaders—have been involved;
- (iii) Extensive mass campaigns on particular issues, including the nation-wide CPI-led "Land grab" campaign of 1970, Massive campaigning by CPI(M) in West Bengal

between '68 & '70 to seize illegally held land of landowners and widespread farmers agitation in Maharashtra from 1970-73 primarily led by Lal-Nishan Party.'

### **Organisations of the Self Employed Women**

41. The 1970s witnessed a new phenomenon in the history of organising, the rise of organisations of self employed women themselves. Unlike the localised one-issue movements, these organisations dealt with the multitude of problems that surrounded the working and living conditions of self employed women. The focus of most of these organisations was the self-employed woman in her work-life and as one issue was taken up, so another emerged. Furthermore, these organisations did not concentrate only on one set of working women such as forest dwellers, or peasants, but continuously expanded on to encompass the mass of self employed women from different occupations within their fold. As new sets of occupational categories came into the organisations, new issues emerged and new unities were forged. Another characteristic of these organisations was that they brought into focus the woman as a complete social being, taking into account not only her economic relations but also her social and political being.

42. As these organisations grew, they began to see that the issues they were lacking were not localised but national in scale. This led them to turn to the national scene. They began to expand nationally, and to network with similar organisations across the country. This expansion threw up a new set of issues. The struggle began to acquire the characteristics of a truly national political movement.

43. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a trade union of over 40,000 poor women workers in Gujarat, India. The union was established in 1972 when a group of headloaders, used garment dealers, junksmiths, and vegetable vendors came together to form a workers' association.

44. The union organizes struggles for higher wages, improved working conditions and social security benefits against dismissals and mass unemployment. Its members' struggle against harassment by police and exploitation by middlemen. In addition it struggles to get assets such as land for women. These struggles are carried out through mass action such in the courts, through lobbying and policy interventions and above all by having an army of expanding membership.

45. However SEWA feels that for weak and vulnerable groups like the self employed women, struggle alone is not sufficient to address to structural constraints within the trades. Thus SEWA also works on "developmental activities by promoting development of Co-operatives of Self-Employed Women.' To date, SEWA has promoted 17 cooperatives including production co-ops, such as garment making block printing, weaving, and milk production, trade co-ops of vegetable vendors and fish vendors, and service co-ops of cleaners, agricultural labourers, tree growers and child care providers. Social security schemes of health care, maternity benefits and insurance are promoted to lend support to the working woman.

46. Today the concept of SEWA has spread to other areas in the country and now there exist SEWA organisations., each independent and autonomous in Delhi, Bhopal, Patna, Bhagalpur, Mithila, Jamshedpur, Ambala, Imphaal and Modhyr, Indore, Jabalpur, each affiliated to SEWA".<sup>16</sup>

47. Moreover, in recognition of the potentially divisive factors of caste, religion, and politics within Indian society, the Forum's founders adopted certain strong ideological positions, the Forum would be pro-women, anti-caste and pro-secularism, anti-politics, and anti-dowry and it tries to unite the women on issues that traditionally might like divided them(caste, religion party politics)"<sup>18</sup>

48. The organising and mobilizing of the local women's groups has also led to the formation of

a union called the National Union of Working Women.

49. WWF has now spread to other states such as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh—

“Annapurna Mahila Mandal is a women’s organisation with a membership of over 15,000 women. It started in 1973 with a programme of assisting women to get bank loans at a concessional rate of interest from the nationalised banks. This resulted in a grassroots organisation.

50. Annapurna Mahila Mandal is structured to have the active and continuous participation from the grassroots level. The local women’s groups are the basic units from which all the organisational activities develop. These local women’s groups consist of the women who have taken a bank loan or have participated in any other programmes of AMM. In 1987, AMM had 20 local women’s group in different area of central Bombay,

51. The women expressed a need for a multi purpose centre which began operating in 1983 with a Bank loan Programme, Catering, Health Programme, Creche, Legal Aid, Vocational Training (Catering and Tailoring), Shelter, Education, Research and Publication activities.

52. AMM members thought that since they had basic skills, after some training in catering they would be able to service different types of clientele. Thus by upgrading their skills they could have a bigger market and also enhance their earnings. Thus a training-cum-employment programme was started. Besides this centralised catering sectors, AMM has started another area in exploring a new field of women’s employment by taking on canteens by a group of self-employed women trained at the centre.”<sup>19</sup>

53. These are only a very few of the organisations which have emerged in the last fifteen years. Organisations working with self-employed, but with different approaches and ideologies have been multiplying all over the country. In this section we will be discussing some aspects of organising these women.

#### **Men and Women: Organising together and separately**

54. An issue that has emerged particularly after the women’s movement took off in 1975, is, Should men and women organise together as part of a larger movement or should they organise separately? This issue has been explored in many different ways theoretically, as well as in practice, by many different groups all over the country.

55. Earlier movements involving social change for the poor did not especially tackle the issues of women’s oppression. Even where this oppression was recognised it was assumed that somehow when the revolution came, women’s oppression would disappear along with other oppression.

56. As a social thinker, Gandhi was an exception in this regard. He realised that women’s oppression had to be regarded as part of the nationalist movement, for him liberation of women from the forces that oppressed them, was as important as their participation in the social movement for justice.

57. “The Working Women’s Forum was formed in 1978 by the initiative of an ex-political activist Jaya Arunachalam with the explicit objective of empowering poor women in both their productive and reproductive roles. The broad objectives of WWF were to create an association of women employed in the unorganised or informal sector, to identify and address the critical needs of working women, to mobilize working women for joint economic and social action by resorting to group pressure and to demand their social and supportive political rights, to improve their entrepreneurial skills through training, material inputs, credit and extension services necessary for working women and their families, such as child care, education, health and family planning.”<sup>17</sup>

“Credit was the focal point around which the forum was founded, so far 40,000 women

have got access to institutional credit through WWF. Recognising the wider social and political forces that limit women's economic opportunities, WWF has started support services for these women.

58. However, apart from the nationalist movement, women's liberation was never seen as a priority. Women participated actively in many 'workers' movements but their problems, their roles, their oppressions by the menfolk was never appreciated. They were seen merely as numbers to add to the movement.

59. The mid-1970's saw a rise of feminist ideology. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, 1974, for the first time set out in detail the inequalities suffered by women as a sex. Women's groups began agitating on particularly women's question such as rape. Women within groups working for social change, such as trade union and political parties began raising the question of women's oppression, within their groups. In the beginning, almost uniformly, women reported resistance to their raising women's question within the context of the larger social movement. The argument used to suppress them was that fighting for women's equality within the movement would internally divide the movement and weaken it. In addition many of the male activists within the movements had a low opinion of women. However as the women's movement has gathered momentum the male activists have had to come to terms with women's issues.

60. In this context, the experience of Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini activists in Bihar during the Bodhgaya struggle is interesting. Vahini activists felt that they had to insist on women's participation when the Vahini began to organise landless labourers in Bodhgaya, they found that they had not taken into account the work of women and the exploitation of this work by men. The struggle was focused on the right for land. It was only as women began to participate in large numbers that the activists began to understand their mistake in ignoring women's specific exploitation. Subsequently, one of the issues that was taken up was that of wife beating. At meetings on the subject, activists insisted that only women would be allowed to speak as otherwise the men would take over. Even so, with men present though silent, the women did not open up too much. Things improved with the next campaign in which women took the initiative: the anti-liquor campaign. Women's committees were formed which would go to the houses of bootleggers unearthen all their bootlegging equipment and bring it away to the committee which would sit in a public meeting where the men were not allowed to speak, and this enabled the women to become more confident. Nirmala Sathe, speaking of the experience of the Shramik Sangathan in Dhulia District, pointed out that even within this struggle of landless labourers women were organising separately within the movement because in working with men it takes time for them to gain confidence.

61. In some case the male activists would not absorb the concepts of women's equality and have either crushed, or removed the women activists. The most dramatic of such examples is SEWA, which was thrown out of its parent trade union, Textile Labour Association, because it was too assertive regarding issues of poor women of the unorganised sector. Some other organisations have started as organisations of poor women and have remained as such, for example Working Women's Forum and Annapurna Mahila Mandal. These organisations have realised that although they remained as organisations purely of poor women, yet they need to be associated with a larger movement and with other organisations doing similar work.

62. Most organisations have recognised that to build a movement of poor self employed women, it is necessary to have a separate organisation of women. Indian society often does not allow women to participate in mixed meetings. In many cultures women have to observe purdah in front of the men of their families. The men also usually do not appreciate women

voicing their views. In such a restricted cultural climate, it is difficult for a woman to learn to overcome her fears and speak up in a meeting. Women often have different priorities from men and in mixed organisations, the women's needs are not given importance. In a mixed organisation, the men's needs tend to dominate and these needs are sometimes in direct contradiction to those of women. In Garhwal for example during a reforestation programme the women wanted to plant fuel and fodder trees, while the men wanted cash trees.

63. Women's problems relating to their oppression by men such as wife beating and alcoholism are issues that emerge during discussions in women's groups. However, women find it very difficult to discuss these problems in a mixed group and the men too tend to get defensive.

64. Finally, women find it easier to get support within their family if they are part of a women's organisation. Their men-folk may not approve of their meeting other men in a mixed group and are more likely to support their efforts with a women's group.

65. On the other hand most organisations have also come to realise that a movement of self-employed women has to be part of a more general movement including men. The basic economic issues of the self-employed are the same and unless men and women are struggling side-by-side, these issues cannot be addressed. At the same time the problems of women's oppression cannot just be solved by women, but must be a joint effort of men and women.

66. Many organisations have tried to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory needs of having a separate women's organisation but at the same time being part of a more general movement.

67. Mixed organisations have tried to achieve this by having within their fold a separate women's wing, as many of the trade union federations—CITU, INTUC, AITUC, HMS, BMS and political parties have done. Others, such as CMSS have formed a separate women's organisation, Mahila Mukti Morcha, within the fold of the trade union.

68. Women's organisations such as SEWA or WWF, have attempted to achieve integration by affiliating with larger federations and by keeping close links and networks with other mixed groups.

#### Vulnerability:

69. The example of poor women organising, though impressive in themselves, are extremely few-and-far-between. All the organisations working with self employed women in spite of their efforts and time have covered not even a tiny fraction of the total number of poor women. During its field investigations the Commission found that most of the self-employed women had not even heard of an organisation which they could join. Spontaneous organising was also practically non-existent. In effect, in spite of the efforts by many organisations, in spite of the stated policies of the government, in spite of the manifestoes of trade unions and political parties, in spite of the women's movement, labour movement, peasants' movement and other local movements, the mass of self-employed women remain unorganised.

70. Given their socio-economic position, this is not surprising. The self-employed woman does not have the means to organise. She has no resources to fall back upon, no support structure, she is the weakest and most vulnerable person in our society, crushed under intolerable burdens.

71. Her economic existence is precarious as she earns her living from day to day. She needs work desperately, but must compete with countless others like herself for the dwindling work opportunities. Very often she has no work and so nothing to eat. Even when she works she earns less than anyone else in the economy.

72. Her work is hard and physically exhausting, often dangerous and her hours of work are long. Her body is weak from ill health and unsafe child bearing.

73. In addition, there is the physical emotional drudgery in the home. She squeezes the most out of the meagre resources to feed her family, she gives emotional and physical care to the children, the old and sick. She is the last to sleep, the first to awaken, she keeps working inspite of illness, till she can no longer stand.

74. Her social existence is oppressive. She is usually of a low caste and so subject to the humiliations and indignities of an unjust caste system. She is a woman and so considered the lowest, rather unwanted within the family. She is a worker without assets and so dependent for her livelihood on the powerful who keep her subjugated.

75. She is illiterate, she has no access to the resources of society, to education, to health care, to social security benefits. She is politically invisible, she cannot make her needs known to the politicians who take her vote.

76. Her life is controlled by decisions made by others. Within her family her will is subject to the decision of her husband, father, son. In her work she is controlled by her employer, contractor, landlord.

77. In her social life she is bound by the rules laid down by her caste, panchayat or community elders in which she has no say. She is treated as a non-entity, a non-person subject always to the needs of others.

78. These socio-economic conditions reveal an extra-ordinary vulnerability. Economically she is vulnerable, afraid of losing her work in a labour surplus economy, if she asks for any more than she gets. Physically she is vulnerable to sexual attacks, to illness, to overwork, socially she is vulnerable to caste and patriarchal oppression. And underlying all this is the hidden, but ever-present threat of violence.

79. She is able to survive under such crushing conditions, only because of her deep faith, her courage, her love for her family and her indomitable will.

80. She is weak, but her weakness is due to the pressures of society. She is weak as a social being, in her relations to others, as a political being, in her social status. However as a person she is strong. Her social weakness requires that she be strong internally. In order to survive in a desperate struggle as the weakest in society, she must develop internal resources of courage and strength. It is these strengths she draws on in the rare cases when she tries to fight back, to organise.

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What happens when Self-Employed Women Organise

81. The act of organising gives rise to a large variety of experiences as the traditions, beliefs, relationships, structures begin to be challenged and shaken. Some of these experiences may be positive and encouraging while others may be negative and demoralizing. An experience of concrete gains fill the woman with confidence to go on.

82. Daku Bai, a village level worker in Daijar, Rajasthan express this confidence when she says:

The contractor of the road construction gang was paying us only Rs. 3 a day, we found out that the minimum wage we should have been getting is Rs. 11 or 7 kg of grain. We decided to do "ekat". We said we would not accept the wages till he paid us Rs. 11 a day. He refused. We held out for two months. Then saw the Collector and told him of our problem. Ten days later the mate can back and paid us the minimum wage and since then there has been no problem."<sup>20</sup>

83. Every victory gave them a sense of confidence about their ability to solve their own problems, and about the power of their "ekat". Similarly an experience of enhancement of

prestige gives a fillup to organising:

"Karimabibi, Vice-President of SEWA says, "Since I have been active in SEWA, people look up to me. Many women in the neighbourhood come to me for advice. Previously, the traders in my area of Dariapur used to mock at me and say "What can she do? She is poor and a widow" But I organised the Chindi (patchwork) workers into SEWA and together we asked the traders for a price-income. We complained to the Labour Commissioner and he called us for negotiations. In the negotiations, five of us workers' representatives sat across the table from the traders. After that the traders began to respect me. They thought that I can also influence the Labour Commissioner."<sup>21</sup>

84. On the other hand negative experiences such as loss of work has a demoralising and dampening effect.

"Organising the tribals is not an easy job. The Gram Vikas Sangh realised that the workers of the Amli Kheda talab must be organised if they were to get any justice. "We set about doing so and every contractor, his hired goon's, sarpanch, mukhiyas and government officials used every tactic and ploy to make sure we could not organise the workers. Endless rumours were spread by them, sections of the workers were bribed and told to attack us, the panchayat samiti pradhan was vociferous in his propaganda against us. He stated the story that we were against any development taking place in this area and were trying to sabotage the talab by stopping work. This was a good step and the contractor and officials hurriedly backed it up by cutting down on work and putting the blame on us. Many tribal labourers turned against us and felt we were depriving them of a chance to work. The contractor stopped work in the talab in April due to some differences with the Irrigation Department over the cost of carting earth to the work site. The real reason for stopping work has never been revealed to the workers by the officials; instead they say it is because the workers dared to raise their heads and ask for better wages.

85. What causes an organising experience to be positive or negative, successful or a failure? In general, failure results from the degree of opposition to the organising efforts whereas success reflects the support that society is willing to give the self-employed women.

86. The opposition to an attempt to organise is a measure of the vulnerability and weakness of the self-employed woman. The opposition to organising comes from different levels of society and exposes her oppression by those social forces. An attempt to organise is also an attempt to challenge oppression and exploitation and the degree of that exploitation is reflected in the amount of opposition and the number of obstacles that the organising attempt faces. Without alternative sources of support the opposition to organising will result in a retreat to the status-quo.

87. Here we will examine the different types of opposition that an organising attempt meets and will also look at the successes and possible systems of support.

### Opposition to Organising

88. It is not easy for a group of poor women to organise. Organising means challenging the status-quo in society, opposing vested interests, and at the same time confronting their own internal fears and weaknesses. Whenever women organise, the dominant class attempts to assert its supermacy and create obstacles and opposition to organising. Here we explore some of these obstacles and show how they dampen the organising effort.



Till today, 31st Dec. '83 work has not been resumed and the blame is being put on us.

These rumours have had many negative results in our attempts to organise the poor. For instance, we got reports that tribals working on project of the Soil Conservation Department in the village of Partipura were being done out of their full wages and there were many other irregularities. Some workers approached us for help but the reaction of the majority of the workers was to beg us not to interfere as work may be stopped altogether and they would lose even the paltry Rs. 3 they were earning.<sup>22</sup>

89. Similarly humiliation and ridicule causes the sparks which help women to organise to die out, and other women hearing of the experience will be less willing to try to organise.

"On June 22, 1980 when I asked Gaura Devi, the famous leader of the movement (Chipko) about her experience, I was shocked to hear instead a story of continuous harassment. "At times we feel like leaving the village" she said, "But where to go?"

The harassment by the village menfolk began the day when Gaura Devi led 27 village women to prevent the contractor's employees and forest department personnel, about 60 men in all, from going to the Reni forest to fell 2,415 trees. While the women were blocking the narrow passage leading to the forest, the men used all sorts of threats and later, on the pretext of being drunk, even tried to misbehave with the women. But the women refused to budge and bravely resisted all misbehaviour. Finally, one of the men spat at Gaura Devi's face. The women remained cool but firm. However, they got frightened at the prospect of being arrested and put behind bars. To save their skin, they made their wives put all the blame on Gaura Devi.<sup>23</sup>

90. In both rural and urban areas, opposition from powerful vested groups is one of the most difficult obstacles that women workers encounter. Powerful groups like landlords, merchants, and contractors, use their might to prevent women from organising. They also disrupt any attempt to destroy any organising efforts and openly demonstrate their hostility. Even outsiders feel this hostility.

91. Gopa Joshi who has earlier described the humiliation faced by women leaders in organising here describes the opposition and hostility faced by them.

"In June, when I, with two friends of the trees (dalian Ka dagaria) visited the village to study the role of women, we were confronted by a hostile mob of the headman's henchmen. They asked why we had not sought the headman's permission to enter the villages."<sup>24</sup>

92. These same powerful men use the trump card of stopping employment to harass and intimidate, especially the leaders or trouble makers. Describing how active leader Hava bibi was victimised during the organising of bidi workers in Patan Gujarat, Renana Jhabvala, the Secretary of SEWA, says:

We get a frantic letter from Hava Bibi, "My contractor has stopped giving me work. He says if you want work go to SEWA—"Anasuya (the organiser) takes the next bus to Patan. "Hava bibi is not getting work," Anasuya reports on her return the next day. "Her daughter is ill and her husband has TB. She has no food in her house. She does not even have anything to pawn. I went to see the contractor, Bhure Khan to persuade him to take Hava bibi back. But he only shouted at me, "Go back to Ahmedabad. You are spoiling our (Muslim) women with your loose ways."

Karma Bibi, who had accompanied Anasuya, explains: "Everybody is afraid. The contractors are making an example of Hava Bibi."<sup>21</sup>

93. The tactic of singling out those who are "weak" or in a particularly disadvantaged situation is also commonly used. Widows, and other single women, as well as the poorest of workers are always singled out and pressurised or even dismissed.

"The Story of Yashoda of Yacharen village in AP of Vyavasay Coolie Sangam is a good example of this

Yashoda's husband, Malla Reddy, was a bonded labourer. The burden of supporting the family of three daughters fell on Yashoda, who works as a labourer. One day, the landlord under whom Malla worked came to know that Malla was taking interest in a newly formed labourers' organisation, the Vyavasaya Collie Sangam, which was fighting to wipe out bondedness and to get a reasonable wage for labourers. As a punishment, the landlord confiscated Yashoda's cattle."<sup>22</sup>

94. A woman is surrounded by restrictions and obstacles not only in her work and her community, but even in her family. If a woman wants to do something unusual like to go to a meeting, she usually has to seek the permission of the males in her household. And often this permission is not forthcoming. The man may feel his authority threatened if his wife goes out and he may resort to violence to stop her. He may also try to restrain his wife because of external pressures on him. When women challenge the status-quo, the powerful groups, instead of directly dealing with the women, may approach the menfolk and order them to put pressure on their wives or daughters. Men are sometimes more vulnerable to such pressures as their employment, benefits or safety may depend on these powerful groups. Men are also sometimes more in awe of the powerful.

95. A women of HP had organised a padyatra to protest against opening of liquor shops.

96. SUTRA had predicted there would be about 500 women on the Padyatra, as at the meeting in September at least that many women had indicated their readiness to come. But only 200 turned up. As Bimla said, "It's the women who most need our support, the women who suffer most, who are not here. Their husbands won't let them come—and they have no money because all the household money goes on liquor."

97. For many women, it was this pressure from their menfolk that prevented their coming. "The women wanted to come. There were a lot quarrels about it, but what could the women do?" Some of the resistance came from the men who were themselves drinkers. Some other men were unwilling to give the women any freedom. In other cases, heavy pressure was applied on the men by local politicians and village leaders who did not want to see the women's strength grow, particularly against liquor vending from which they gain much of their power.

98. In the interim period, the women were busy planning an annual mela at Jagjitnagar. But many men opposed their plans, spreading rumours against SUTRA and threatening to beat their wives if they attended the mela which was held on February 22. The turnout was much lower than earlier year."<sup>26</sup>

99. Similar experiences were noted with the Rural Women Organisation in Tamil Nadu.

"At first, men interfered with women's meetings, and scoffed, citing such proverbs as "The day breaks only when a cock crows, not when a hen squawks." Many members were forbidden by their husbands to attend the women's meetings and were beaten

when they went anywhere. These women kept coming. They got out of the house by saying they were going to the market. When we touch on issues concerning the role of woman in the family we face a lot of problems. Recently, the husband of a leader of a village women's movement threatened to divorce her if she continued to involve herself in the struggle."<sup>27</sup>

100. Alliances with other power groups and even government functionaries are used to squash organising efforts. Landlords, merchants and others themselves organise to oppose the workers' efforts at organising. Needless to say, these formidable alliances are very intimidating and threatening as far as poor women are concerned. Further, powerful groups seek the assistance of the police or even local bureaucrats. They do this by virtue of their status, social and political connections and even by bribery.

101. The activists of the Ibrahampatnam Taluka Agricultural Labourers' Union complained that:

1200 acres of rich textile land has been occupied by a single landlord. The people of this village, pleaded with the Government to take over this benami land, and distribute it among the landless. Three months ago, when the people cleared the land of shrubs in a symbolic attempt to focus on the problem, the landlord called in the police and had persons arrested. When the people wanted to hold a public meeting, the police refused to give permission for public address. Even after the High Court gave permission, the mike was snatched away by the C.I. saying 'Go crying to your High Court'. The women of this village have been the most active, leading in all the protests, dharnas and meetings.<sup>28</sup>

102. Violence is also commonly used by the powerful to stop organising efforts by poor women. This violence takes the form of beatings, torture and even killings. This violence is either perpetrated by the dominant groups themselves or by their militias as in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and elsewhere.

103. In the struggle for land against the Bodh Gaya Math, in Bihar, the activists of Chhatra Sangharsh Vahini describe this violence:

"In November, 1978, the labourers, activists of Persa village decided to reap the crop but keep it for themselves instead of taking it to the Math. In the Bodh Gaya struggle, all programmes are usually publicly announced in advance. Therefore, the Math had time to prepare itself. Early in the morning, hired ruffians and musclemen of the Math surrounded the fields.

The Math spread police and goonda terror throughout the area. There were many incidents of ruffians waylaying and beating the villagers, abusing the women and threatening to rape them. Dozens of false cases were registered in local courts against the villagers. Individuals would be arrested from the marketplaces, so that no collective resistance was possible. Every effort was made to frighten the women and girls. It became dangerous for women to go out alone or even to go out at all at night.

In one incident, one of the Vahini activists, a tribal girl named Alice Kanchan, was going from one village to another, when she was caught hold of by some ruffian youths, beaten, abused, and insulted. her clothes were torn, Jankidas, who was with her, was also beaten up."<sup>29</sup>

104. Similar violence was experienced during the anti-liquor struggle in U.P.

"In Menagi Village, last April, Vaishakhi Devi, a number of men were sitting together in a house and drinking. She immediately took a lantern and set out to stop them. The drunkerds grabbed the lantern, threw it at Vaishaki Devi and, as her clothes caught fire, pushed her into a wheatfield. Vaishkhi Devi was badly burnt from her chest to her knees."<sup>30</sup>

105. In the struggle between the powerful and the weak the stronger groups make use of the forces of law and order, such as the police. In these cases the police, forest guards etc. use force to intimidate the struggling women or to break their movement.

"In Maheswaram village in Rangareddy district of AP the landless poor won a court injunction to get Govt. land for themselves. When they went to farm this land, the police arrested them and took them to the police station under the supervision of the Sub-Inspector of Maheshwaram Police Station. The Police once again beat all the victims in the police station abusing them in the most filthy language. The SI mocked at the victims and said, "even now do you want to have land"? he further criminally intimidated the victims saying "If you dream of land these are the consequences you have to meet" so saying he instructed the constables to beat the victims."<sup>231</sup>

106. Another very common method of trying to subdue women's organising efforts or questioning the existing exploitative system is sexual exploitation or harassment. The most violent form of this is rape.

Sexual innuendo is sometimes the first stage of brutal sexual attacks on women who insist on fighting for social justice. "My sister Maria always stood up to the Dadas", says Honorita, living in Bombay's Dharavi slum. "Near her house there was an illicit brewery where goondas used to congregate and there was a 'rada' every night. Maria organised all the women of the area, and they went to the municipal corporator, the police, the mayor and even the Chief Minister. Finally they managed to close down the brewery. The Dadas were very angry and spread rumours that Maria was a loose women. They began shouting crude remarks at her. But still Maria did not let them re-open their distillery. Then one evening as she was returning from her shopping three goondas pounced on her, dragged her behind a shed and beat and raped her. The police wouldn't even register her complaint."<sup>32</sup>

## **Internal Weakness**

107. The external obstacles to organising are certainly formidable. They are further reinforced by the women's own internal weaknesses. Through their weak self-image and their inter-group divisions poor women themselves perpetrate their own oppression.

108. The biggest internal weakness is the division among women workers. Women perceive neither themselves, nor other women as workers. They do not see the need for unity with each other. At the same time there are the strong divisions of caste and religion which keep them apart.

109. Many organisations have found that one of the major obstacles to unity are the caste divisions. Women of slightly higher castes are reluctant to sit with and meet with women of lower castes, although their economic conditions may be the same, WWF, for example has found to be a major problem and has taken up a special programme of caste integration in order to build unity among the workers.

110. In areas where communal tensions have dominated, it has become difficult to build unity among workers who are in the same occupations, but are of different religions. SEWA, Singbhum and SEWA Gujarat, had to make special efforts for communal harmony to keep their members united, after communal riots broke out in their areas.

111. Another internal obstacle is that poor women tend to see themselves as weak, powerless, and ignorant. They undervalue themselves and as a result are afraid to take positive action.

112. Organisers report that when they first go into an area, women are often disparaging about their capacity for action. Women come out with statements like "We are illiterate" "We are ignorant", very often they feel that even if they are ready to organise, other women will not support them. They tend to undervalue their own qualities and make remarks like "Hamari to takdeer hi phooti hai, hum kya kar Sakte hai?"

The Economic system promotes oppression

113. However, the greatest obstacle to organising is neither the opposition from external groups, nor Women's own fears, but just the structure of our economic system. These women struggle for subsistence at the lowest categories of employment. All of their attention, skill, and life force goes into the mere struggle to stay alive. Should they divert their attention even for a short while from the subsistence struggle they may very well go under. If a woman misses her day's work to go to meeting she and her children may not eat that day. If she gives up her chance that she will lose whatever little place she has in the economic system.

114. The economic system forces the women to cling to their sources of work, because it offers no alternative employment. Instead of constantly expanding work opportunities to meet the needs of a growing population, our economy decreases even the existing work opportunities. Mechanisation of industrial and artisanal production and agriculture, and destruction of natural resources through deforestation destroys the means of livelihood of the poor who then have to turn away from their traditional methods of production and enter into an intensely competitive, cat-and-dog struggle for the ever-decreasing work available to them.

Organising successfully:

115. In spite of the obstacles, in spite of the opposition, in spite of the struggle at subsistence level women do sometimes manage to organise. And when they do, it is an empowering, positive experience. Organising changes the world of the women, it changes their self perception, it changes their relations with others, it changes the society around them and often it causes larger political changes.

116. The most obvious advantage of organising is that it gives the women tangible, concrete gains.

- Women actually acquired and tilled land in the Bodh Gaya struggle. As one of the women, Malan, said. "Didi, we have got just an acre of land. It isn't as if we have got a lot to eat but now can we say it has made no difference? It *has* made a difference."
- In Nipani the tobacco workers' wages increased and with it their life style.
- AMM succeeded in giving loans at 4% interest per annum instead of at 120% per annum from money lenders.
- Alternative housing was created by SPARC for pavement dwellers in Bombay whose houses were destroyed.
- landless labourers formed milk cooperatives, acquired cattle and began earning with the help of SEWA.

- Some liquor shops were closed down in H.P. after struggle by SUTRA women.
- The iron ore mine workers who were employed on contract basis were successful in raising their daily wages from Rs. 4 to Rs. 19 after organising into CMSS.

117. In a society where the struggle is for mere survival, a little more may make a major difference to the well being of the woman and her family.

118. To a poor woman, who has so much to loose and is so weak and vulnerable, having gained a tangible benefit, means much more than can be measured in concrete terms. As Malan of Bodh Gaya says:

“Didi, earlier, we had tongues but could not speak, we had feet but could not walk. Now that we have got the land, we have got the strength to speak and to walk.”<sup>33</sup>

119. Whenever an organising attempt is able to show some concrete gain, it generates confidence, spirit, and the desire to do more. It gives a major boost to the organising process.

120. However, a tangible gain is only possible when the organising attempt begins to break through many of the stereotypes and the opposition to the poor women. A successful organising attempt begins to change the perception of society at many different levels. Perhaps the first and most important perceptive change is that the problems of the poor women begin to be recognised as problems. They then become problems of society as a whole.

121. The Chipko struggle, for example, forced the state government to acknowledge the possibility that cutting down forests was creating landslides. It set up an expert committee which confirmed this view. Soon, environmentalist nationally and internationally acclaimed the Chipko movement as did Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. This led to intense debate within the country on the problem of deforestation and a massive reforestation programme by the government. Thus a problem of hill women in Garhwal was converted through the Chipko struggle into a national issue.

122. A society's preception of the problem changes, so also does its attitude towards the women who have organised to protect their rights. As we have described earlier, often the attitude towards the women hardens and they are confronted with opposition from their communities and within their households. In successful organising attempts, on the other hands, the opposite is perceived. The attitude of the community towards the women becomes more positive, as does the attitude of the state and the larger forces.

123. The Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan found that after organising the women into groups, the caste panchayats were much more responsive to the needs of the women and began to modify and alter their decision to make them more positive to women.

124. Government officials such as the BDO who previously would refuse to even see the poor women, now treat them with respect, listen to their complaints and often try to solve their problems. Even an official as high as the Secretary, Social Welfare, began to take the women seriously.

125. As women begin to be honoured outside their house, so also the attitude of their men-folk changes. Talking about the change in the attitude of men in the villages of AP where women had been organised, Maria Mies says.

“Men did the cooking for the common meal for the women, and were supposed to look after the children. This active participation of the men was in itself a great achievement and can be seen as a sign that the women's sangams had grown in importance.”<sup>34</sup>

126. The most decisive change that occurs in the organising process, is the alteration in the personalities of the women taking part in the organisation. The more active a women is in the organising, the more she empowers herself, the more both her perception towards herself and her life changes.

"Laro Janko a women activist in the Bihar mines was afraid to speak in public. "I kept thinking like this and began to get worried. I thought why can't I speak? I will certainly speak. I got a Khatpata in my heart, I became restless. One day I was asked to speak in a meeting. I did not speak very forcefully. Baap re Baap, I felt so ashamed of the way I had spoken. I felt like covering myself with a lid. My body was trembling. But they kept giving me opportunities to speak in meetings. After speaking a number of times I began to get a heat in my head.

Then when the mines closed down, throwing us all out of employment, we struggled for reopening the mines. The management attacked us with hired ruffians, police, military police, police women. That time, I was really filled with heat and abused the management. Since that day the heat has gone up into my head."<sup>35</sup>

127. The release of internal energy, generates a creative power whereby she develops talents and skills she never had before. Her dormant creative powers begin to awake.

"In Rajasthan thousands of poor rural women have gathered, they sing and dance and some of them discover a vein of poetry in themselves and compose songs suitable to their issues and struggles."<sup>36</sup>

128. As her creative power is released, she begins to feel more in control of her life, of her body, of the events surrounding her. As a woman's self-confidence increases, as she feels more empowered, she begins to break out of the cocoon of her everyday existence. She begins to perceive the larger world, she herself begins to feel a part of the larger world and she understands the larger forces of exploitation and sees her role in the larger struggle for justice.

129. Until now she has been pursuing singlemindedly the struggle for survival and everyday earning. Now her view broadens and she thinks about her life, beyond today. Savings, preventive approaches to health, family planning, become an important part of her life.

The WDP programme in Rajasthan found that after organising in villages women insisted on going for sterilization even though earlier they had completely rejected the family planning campaign. Similarly, women asked for adult education, saying, "Ab to angootha lagane main sharam ave!"<sup>37</sup>

130. The process of organising helps a woman to break out of her preconceived self image as only mother, wife, household rudge. She becomes a worker along with other workers. Some times she becomes a leader of a group.

Shushila Naik, a tobacco processing worker in Nipani was elected a leader. She was much younger than other workers. She was illiterate, she was a devdasi and yet because of her strong personality, her determination and strength she became the leader. Once, when she was asked: "What would you have done if you had not joined the union? How would you have found an outlet for your talents?" Her reply was illuminating: "Probably, my talents would not have been discovered. I would not have remained worker. Since I have a good singing voice, I would have joined a group of singing devdasis."<sup>38</sup>

131. Organising is a process whereby the individual has to break out of her isolation and consider herself part of a larger group which acts cohesively. Organising is to create a united group of people acting together on issues of mutual concern. The creation of such a group breaks down the divisions between women. As women of different castes, different religions, and different communities sit together in meetings, protest together, eat together, think together, the social division begin to break down. This is the true meaning of communal integration.

132. Despite the numerous and complex impediments to organising, self-employed women workers do organize and struggle, with extraordinary courage and strength. Reports from all over the country are a testimony to their commitment to overcome the various crisis and barriers which appear, at first, insurmountable.

Issues around which self-employed women organise:

133. Regional, caste, community, religious and occupational differences notwithstanding, there is a commonality about the economic and social issues on which poor women organize. Women organize on several issues at a time and these generally overlap, reinforce and complement each other. A few of the major issues that women workers organize on are given below.

Organising for Land:

134. Land is the bulwark of the rural society. Wealth, employment, capital, power all comes out of the land.

135. Poor women generally own no or meagre amounts of land. Recognizing that the key to control is through land, some women's groups have struggled to gain land for themselves. In this they are supported by progressive legislation like land reform, and ownership of the tiller. These struggles have to be carried out in the face of tremendous opposition from powerful groups who do not want to let go of land they hold, illegally.

136. The Bihar struggle, of the landless, against the Bodhgaya Math, succeeded in pressurising government to seize 1,500 acres that were illegally held by the Math and to redistribute this land amongst the labourers.

However, the government administration officers refused to give the land in women's names. Their argument was that land must be given in the name of the head of the household who, according to them, could only be a man. In 1982, women of Sherghati gheraoed the district authorities and argued with them. The authorities said the land was to be given to landless labourers. The women pointed out that they too were landless labourers.

After this agitation about 150 acres of land were given in women's names in Kusa and Beeja villages of Sherghati. <sup>39</sup>

137. In Maharashtra's Thane district, tribal women have struggled for years to obtain land ownership and regain lands owned by non-tribals. They have worked through organisations like Bhoomi Sena, Shramjivi and Kashtakari Santhana. In Andhra Pradesh, women have organized for land as part of the Ibrahimmatnam Taluk agricultural Labourers union and in Orissa women have organised into the Karandimal Sanghathana and have struggled to redeem mortgaged land.

138. Freeing bonded labour is another issue taken up by various groups. Women workers in Thirumalaipalam, Burgamap and Khammam, blocks of Andhra Pradesh for example,



organize to free themselves from bondage. Women in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Maharashtra were also among those who struggled for freedom from this bondage.

139. Minimum wages and better working conditions, including security of service, regulated hours of work, provident fund, bonus and paid leave are universal issues. Both rural and urban women workers have organised on these. Disha for example is an organisation fighting for the rights of women in the forest of Gujarat. Many of the forest dwellers are employed directly by the Forest department or Forest Development Corporation as casual labourers and are paid well below the minimum wages of Rs. 15-20. Disha has insisted that these workers be paid the minimum wage and through the labour department's intervention has obtained wage settlements.

140. Even worse is the condition of forest produce collectors who are predominantly women and children. The rates for collection are fixed by the forest department which pays about Rs. 7 for 8 hours work. Disha has filed a petition in the High Court and also organised an 8 days strike to press for a fair minimum wage.<sup>44</sup>

141. In Karnataka, thousands of tobacco workers have organised for minimum wages, provident fund, bonus, eight hour work—days and security for service. The latter is a particularly pressing issue because of the increasing mechanization in the tobacco industry and the displacement of women workers that result from this. There are examples of sweepers and construction workers in Rajasthan, some fishermen in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu and a few Bihari paper-rollers, tasar spinners and leaf-plate makers who have made demands for minimum wages and other improvements in working conditions. Part of their struggle is to obtain official notification of minimum wages and then demand these from their employers.

There are also instances of workers organising for better working conditions. One such example is of an organising attempt by domestic workers in Pune. Meagre salaries and lack of paid leave were the main problems which spurred the maidservants into a spontaneous strike action on February, 8, 1980. Two maidservants from Karve Road, Pune had fallen sick and had to go on leave. A few maidservants had appealed to the employers not to cut the pay of those women. When their appeal was refused, they left the workplace and narrated the incident to various maids they met on the way, saying that they had gone on strike. Within an hour, about 150 servants from Karve Road spontaneously struck work.

142. The maid servants decided to launch the agitation though they were fully aware of the risk of losing their jobs. In some localities, they did not report to work for as long as 20 days, till their demands were met. They won their demands on their collective strength.<sup>41</sup>

#### Space for Vendors

143. All over the country vendors are considered illegal and denied a space to sell. In Imphal, Manipur women vendors have organised for their right to occupy their traditional space in the market, and continue to resist the government's efforts to move them to make space for a modern market building. There have been struggles by some vegetable vendors in Ahmedabad and Bombay to be allowed to sell their wares undistributed in their traditional spots in the main market, and for licenses.

#### Developing alternative production system

144. Women workers in small groups all over the country have been exploring the possibility of developing units or systems where the entire mode of production—from

raw materials to actual production, pricing and marketing—remains under the workers control.

145. SEWA has sponsored over 17 co-operatives of poor women, including mill co-operatives, garment producers co-operatives cleaners co-operatives paper pickers co-operatives agricultural labourers and tree growers co-operatives fish vegetable and kerosene vendors co-operatives to develop an alternative to the exploitative production system of the Middleman. In Jabalpur, SEWA has been struggling to form a bidi workers' co-operatives.

146. In Andhra Pradesh, Samakhya has been training poor rural women to form credit-co-operatives farmers' co-operatives and milk co-operatives. Annapurana Mahila Mandal, an organisation of women who have been traditionally running small lunch houses, started a catering section where women get training and employment. This has upgraded their existing skills, given them security of regular employment & better social status. By working collectively they have also gained confidence and solidarity.

147. In Bankura district in West Bengal, forest workers (mainly tribals) have been organised by Nari Bikash Sangh. To increase their earning and avoid exploitation by contractors who pay them very low rates for the forest produce, the women have themselves started making leaf plates & rope making and have sought local as well as urban markets.

148. Obtaining Recognition as workers is very much linked to the issue of visibility in general for all self Employed women workers. Because they are not recognised as workers, many women remain invisible to planners, policy-makers and the public in general. This is particularly true of the thousands of home-based workers. The lace-makers of Narsarpur, Andhra Pradesh and bidi workers of Vellore from WWF are examples of women who have organised for recognition as workers and coverage by labour laws. Their sisters in Ahmedabad, involved in readymade garment sewing, agarbatti making and other home-based trades and in Chikan and Zari embroidery in UP are also struggling for recognition as workers.

#### Obtaining access to credit

149. Although there is a nationwide credit network of nationalised, co-operatives and private banks, the self-employed women even today have little access to cheap credit. Women need credit for their trade, for buying assets such as land, for inputs into family or artisanal production, for social occasion such as marriages, for emergencies such as illness or for hard times such as drought. They have to borrow from private money lenders at interest rates as high as 120% and in doing this so often pawn away their jewellery.

150. Credit and with it savings, is perhaps the most successful issue around which women's organisations have been built. WWF is a pioneer in this field.

"Access to credit has made a big difference in the lives of the more than 40,000 women who, so far, have received loans from the forum. The loan programme has had a very tangible impact on the women's business and on the welfare of their families. An estimated 2,800 new jobs or businesses have resulted from the program and earnings have increased an average of 50% in existing enterprises. It also has assisted many women to expand and diversify their economic activities.<sup>42</sup>

151. In addition to linking with the nationalised banks, women's groups have formed

their own credit and savings co-ops. or even their own bank. Almost every ongoing group has a small savings and credit scheme.

152. Obtaining access to raw-materials and assistance with marketing are particularly important issues for the thousands of women workers who spin, weave, make baskets, pots and other handicrafts. They are also important issues for vendors, together with the question of space for vending.

"Ghar, in dist. Saharanpur of U.P. is populated mainly by Harijans, banjaras and poor muslims. Here about 40,000 families are involved in traditional rural industry of cutting and producing bean rope.

The working plan of the Shivalik Division for 1979-1988 recognises the traditional rights of the people over the raw materials, fuel and fodder provided by the forest. But since 1962 the forest corporation, have through their continued association with vested interests, conspired to deprive the people of these rights.

The local people are now struggling for access to the forest as their traditional rights, and formed the Ghar Kshetra Mazdoor Morcha. They formulated 3 demands: restoration of traditional rights of people to forest produce, removal of contractors from the forest and fixing of a retail price for bhabber grass based on actual cost and expenditure.<sup>43</sup>

153. Not many women's groups have been able to successfully tackle the problem of suitable access to markets. 'Dasatkar' which is registered as a voluntary organisation and is sponsored by the All Indian Handicrafts Board was established in response to the problems and needs of these producer groups.

154. The major contribution of this organisation, is that it brings together the artisans and the consumers through organising exhibitions in urban centres. Through these exhibition, the producers not only get a fair price for their products and feedback about the consumers preference and but also get training and confidence in direct sales. The design catalogue which they have developed also helps these groups in boosting their sales.

155. This group carries out market surveys as well as surveys to identify the groups who would need their assistance, and provide consultations/inputs for product design and managerial guidance to these groups.

156. Housing, water and sanitation are major concerns of poor women workers. Both urban and rural women have been very actively organizing for housing and have participated in the national campaign for housing rights. In cities like Bombay, and Calcutta for example women have organised to resist demolitions of their homes by the civic authorities. In Rajasthan and Maharashtra, women have been active in obtaining water supply and sanitation for their neighbourhoods after protracted struggles. In Maharashtra, women have even formed 'pani Panchayats' to ensure that water supply reaches all poor workers.

"In Jaipur, to get water connections for the slums, the slum dwellers appealed to the authorities. There is one tap for 250 families and it is simply not enough. The authorities said they could not comply to the demand for more taps. So the slum dwellers cut the main pipelines and the next day the authorities came in and reluctantly fitted taps. But in a couple of days they turned up again to disconnect the taps. Here, also the women in the slums took charge and patrolled the taps to see that no one came to tamper with them. Even 75-years old women helped in the patrolling. In protest, the women also went and broke waterpots by the thousands outside the Chief Minister's house. The slum dwellers spread a whole network of taps in the slum and the authorities dare not to do anything. They (the slum dwellers) are not willing to accept the discriminatory policies of the government for the rich and poor any longer. The rich have water taps separately for baths, toilets, car garages, lawns etc and the poor have to suffer one tap for 250 families.

The slum dwellers have been successful in clearing out unscrupulous speculators registering for housing for slum dwellers provided by the Housing Board. All those not living in the slum have been identified from the lists submitted to the Housing Board and have been exposed in the local newspapers. Centrally located slums have a premium land value and several agencies want to evict them and shift them to the outskirts of the city. Again, the slum dwellers have refused to move and have registered their slums as societies, to give them legal status."<sup>44</sup>

157. Environmental issues centring on conservation of precious water supply, fuel and fodder resources have also been concerns on which women have organised. This has been particularly true of hillwomen, women who live in forested areas and those in dry and drought-affected regions. In Gujarat, women workers of dairy cooperatives have organised for fodder and also for digging of wells. Tribals women in Orissa have also been organizing to preserve their heritage, the forests, on which they depend not only for various products but also for fuel and fodder. Besides the Chipko movement discussed earlier, in Uttarakhand women have organised and protested against indiscriminate quarrying which is causing serious problems of landslides.

Obtaining access to health and child care services:

"Some village women have organised politically to fight for better health care. In village Paliyankuppam, Tamil Nadu families were affected by virus fever which was spreading rapidly. With the help of the village health workers the villagers reported this to the nearby primary health centre, but the doctor in charge refused to attend to the problem immediately. The villagers then sent telegram to the district health office and to authorities in the health department. The next day district medical team arrived and the negligent doctor was reprimanded in front of the villagers".<sup>45</sup>

158. In Maharashtra, in Gadchiroli and Jamkhed districts, hundreds of village women, trained as health workers, not only provide health service but also organize women on health issues such as insufficient and irregular drug supply at the government health centres. In West Bengal, Orissa and Gujarat a large number of women have organised for better health care.

"Mobile Creches is an organised programme of day care for the children of poor working women, both on construction sites and in slums resettlement colonies. The organisation was also successful in creating, to a limited extent, public awareness of the problems of migrant children through its publications, seminars, volunteers, and exhibitions. Even more significantly, Mobile Creches persuaded the government to institute a scheme of financial assistance to agencies running day care for the poor, so that more could be reached."<sup>46</sup>

159. Similarly, in Bihar some bidi workers and others have organised for creches and anganwadies. Finally, women workers have organised around the issue of obtaining ration cards and subsidized foodgrains.

160. Removal of untouchability has been taken up by many women workers as part of their struggle for justice and equality.

"In Jaipur, Rajasthan, slum dwellers, who are predominantly scheduled castes, have been organized to demand their rights for entry to temples, restaurants, and to other places where untouchability is practised. The slum dwellers themselves form a legal committee which brings to public notice all the cases where such discrimination exists, and demands permission to enter."<sup>47</sup>

161. Also in Mithila, Bihar, women who make Madhubani paintings and lac bangles continue to struggle against the strict caste taboos of traditional Maithili Society.

## Alcoholism

162. In husbands and other men-folk is a problem universally faced by poor women, and they continue to organize actively against this. In Himachal Pradesh's Solan district, thousands of hill women have struggled for the closing of liquor shops and cancellation of licence for distilling. Similarly in Almora, U.P. hill women have organized and women who work in mines in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatisgarh area have also done so. Many women find that wife-beating is an issue closely related to alcoholism, because it is generally drunken husbands who abuse women the most in this way

## Rape, violence and Sexual harassment.

163. Rape is one of the most explosive issues around which women have organised. The rape case of 15 year old Mathura by policeman set off a wave of protest around the country and led to the enactment of a new, and stringent act against rape. In Nipani tobacco workers have organised against sexual harassment and rape as have mine workers in Chhatisgarh.

164. Fatima Bernard, organising Mahila Sangarsh in Tamil Nadu describes such an incident.

"We have begun organising women by taking up cases of atrocities on women. On December 24, 1980, an eleven year old girl named Suganya was attacked while she was playing with friends. She was raped and stabbed 21 times. She had to be hospitalised and put in intensive care. Although everyone knew who the rapist was, the police did not arrest him because he was an important person in the local branch of the ruling political party. The issue was discussed in a women's meeting and a protest rally was organised. We were refused police permission to hold a demonstration but we went ahead. About 2000 women from neighbouring villages participated, taking the risk of arrest. We were surprised by the spontaneous participation of so many women at such short notice."<sup>48</sup>

## Organising around legal and policy changes

165. Groups of Self-employed women begin by raising and dealing with local problems, but gradually it becomes clear that many of these are in fact larger issues which have to be dealt with at the state or National level. Most problems cannot be solved by mere adjustments within the system, but need major legal or policy changes. In this case groups tend to net work with one another and approach the courts, the parliament or legislative assemblies.

166. When Parliament wanted to amend the Forest Act, for example, many groups of forest dwellers opposed it. Similarly the Bombay hawkers, and later Ahmedabad Hawkers went to the Supreme Court for a re-interpretation of their constitutional rights, workers are asking for a new act for the homebased workers.

## Methods used in Organizing

167. The methods used by workers are as diverse as the workers' groups themselves. However, a few of the common and often-used methods will be discussed here. Some of the methods listed are more frequently incorporated in one particular strategy, and others are used simultaneously in various strategies.

168. Intensive contact with individuals and groups of workers is very important at all stages of organizing. With such contact, workers build up trust and faith in each other, and in organizers, who may not be workers. They need to feel supported and encouraged. In addition, self-employed women workers must feel that the group is sensitive to their needs and problems. Rather than waiting for them to come to a centre or office with grievances, it is

important to reach out to them. Finally, self-employed women have to develop their self-esteem and self-concept as workers, and this is best done if, through intensive contact, groups of workers become close to each other and develop a spirit of camaraderie.

169. Surveys of neighbourhoods where self-employed workers live and of their living and working conditions, not only reveal women's problems and needs, but also can be a way of building strength and unity. This is because several individual women's experiences are collectivised in the survey process, resulting in a kind of 'collective diagnosis' of worker's lives. Both the process and results of the "Collective diagnosis" can be powerful ways of consciousness-raising, and many groups have found it to be a useful "launching pad" for further organising activities. Finally these surveys are also ways to record and document worker's experiences for lobbying action. In addition, data generated, as well as the new awareness generated can be channelized for confrontation and also developmental activities.

170. Small group meetings are an ideal forum for developing strength, unity, support and confidence. In this non-threatening milieu, workers find that they can speak out, many for the first time ever, and express their ideas, needs and hopes. In addition, as the group feeling develops, a sense of solidarity and unit emerges, essential ingredients for organizing.

171. Training is an important way of developing individuals and groups of workers, and equipping them for the various tasks and skills that are required in the organizing process. Leadership, consciousness-raising and public speaking sessions are among the training inputs essential for all organizing strategies.

172. Public meetings and rallies are important ways of building strength, confronting and even lobbying at various levels. First, these generate a tremendous feeling of solidarity and unity, of "strength in numbers". Important linkages between groups of self-employed women workers are made at such events. Also, just meeting their "sisters in struggle" leads to a sense of elation and a mood of optimism and energy. In addition, workers become visible, not just to each other, but to policy makers, planners and the public at large. Large rallies are often covered by the media and thus given some exposure, which could contribute to a more sympathetic climate vis-a-vis workers' demands and needs. Finally, such rallies can be a way of confronting powerful groups, revealing workers' strength, power and determination.

173. Collective bargaining or negotiation is used by some workers. They literally sit face-to-face with employers, landlords and others and negotiate a settlement acceptable to both. Workers involved in this process have to be confident and conversant with negotiating skills. They also have to be careful that they are not victimised later by employers. In addition, there have been many instances where landlords, merchants and others have not honoured the agreement reached even if it was a legal and binding one.

174. Alliances are made between groups of workers in different regions on common issues to help workers build strength and unity in the process of confrontation and even in lobbying because the pressure of the groups is increased by these alliances. Tobacco workers in Karnataka and Gujarat, for example, are working together to fight against the mechanization of the industry and consequently the imminent displacement of women workers.

175. Some self-employed women also ally with political parties or movements, as this increases their strength and clout. Several agricultural workers, for example, have joined the Shetkari Sanghathana in Maharashtra.

176. Gherao, Dharna, Satyagraha, Morchas, rallies, courting arrest and other methods of non-violent resistance are very commonly used for all over the country, as methods of confrontation. They also help in building strength and unity, and generating pressure which can be used in advocacy work. In Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, women who make nets by hand took out "morchas" or processions and held "dharnas" or "sit-ins" to stop the

government from licensing a nylon net factory in their areas. In Rajasthan workers digging at an irrigation project surrounded their contractor for three days and two nights ("gherao") and refused to let him go till he paid their wages. In Andhra Pradesh, landless agricultural labourers physically occupied land illegally taken over by landlords. Finally, readymade garment workers in Ahmedabad took to the streets and marched to the labour Commissioner's office to demand immediate notification of minimum wages for their work. These are but a few instances of how workers use different methods like processions, "Dharnas" (sit-ins), and "gheraoing" (surrounding' employers as a part of their strategies for organizing.

177. Strikes are also used in the process of confrontation. As in the case of dharnas and other methods mentioned above strikes also create a sense of solidarity and strength. It should be mentioned that strikes take a particularly heavy toll of self-employed women workers because they are so poor and vulnerable, with few reserves in terms of money or alternative income sources. And yet, women do choose this methods. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, agricultural labourers in Aswaraopet block struck for higher wages. Similarly in Rajasthan, sweepers in Jaipur stopped work for better wages, cleaning equipment and overall working conditions.

178. Media, the press, television, videos and documentary films have all been used in strengthening worker's unity, confronting powerful groups and advocacy efforts. Using the media to disseminate information, creates a sympathetic atmosphere and even expose the exploitation of vested interests. It is not easy to use the media to women's advantage. Several sections of the press, television and other media are only used to viewing workers' struggles from a media-class perspective. What is worse is that vested interests, either through their social connections or economic pressure are able to "buy off" the media: workers have to struggle to get seen, heard or appear in print.

179. However, several self-employed workers have managed to use the media to their advantage. Chikan workers in Lucknow participated in a feature film, "Anjuman", alongside filmstars. The film which centred on the exploitation and difficult lives of chikan workers was important because the public learned of their problems, and it created sympathy and support for worker's organizing efforts.

180. Representation in Policy-making bodies at the regional, national and international levels has been mentioned already in connection with the strategy of lobbying. In addition, representation at various levels also helps in the strategy of confrontation because of the sympathetic climate it can create. It also strengthens unity and boost workers' morale to know that their voices are being heard at some of the top decision-making levels, both nationally and internationally. This also applies to the organising strategy in which developmental activities are a part, because workers' representatives can use their position at policy-making levels to influence both the speed of implementation and ensuring that this actually takes place.

181. At some point in the organizing process, self-employed women workers form organizations. These may or may not have a legal structure. Many cases have been documented where self-employed women form an organisation without making it a legal entity. Some are traditional women's organizations like the "Shinalong" of the Naga Tribes in the North-East, traditional collectives in Assam, Mahila Mandals and Sanghams in various part of the country are some examples. Workers in such groups have chosen not to register their organisation, because the group remains informal and flexible. There is no external interference especially from government agencies. Self-employed women feel more comfortable and in control when dealing with organisations where there are no formal procedures.

182. However, it should be noted that through their experience, workers find that there are also certain disadvantages to having such unregistered, informal groups.

183. Sometimes when the immediate need for which workers organised is satisfied, or even when it fails to be satisfied, the groups disintegrate. There is no incentive or pressure for the group to remain cohesive or interest. A legal entity with its set procedures of periodic meetings and activities provides a mean for members to continually interact and come together.

#### The State and Organizing

184. The relationship between the State and groups of women who try to organise is incredibly complex. The State itself is not a monolith but contains within itself a variety of forces, often contradictory to one another.

185. The guiding document of the State, the Indian Constitution is remarkable for its leaning towards justice and equality for all. Women in particular, are recognised by the constitution as a weak and vulnerable section which must be given special protection. So going by the Constitution alone, the State should be totally sympathetic towards the aspirations of the self-employed women.

186. The constitution, however is a document at a high level of abstraction. The Principles of the Constitution are translated into the policies of the state. The Indian State has chosen a path of mixed economic development i.e. the economy is a combination of private and public enterprise. The performance of these economic policies often go against the interest of the self-employed women and causes the state to view their attempts to organise with disfavour.

187. The constitution directs the Indian State to follow the path of electoral democracy for its political system. This means that the polity has to be responsible to the needs and aspirations of its electorate. Here again the State is tugged in contradictory directions as the needs and desires of different sections of the population are often quite in contrast to each other. The self-employed women constitute a majority of the female population and in sheer numbers are an important section of the electorate. However the vested interests on the other hand are equally important. The political elite itself is part of the economic and social elites. Also, the financing of electoral politics and political parties comes from the economically powerful groups.

188. The state is responsible to groups which achieve a certain quality that Nirmala Banerjee calls it "Political visibility"

"This amorphous quality which can be called the political visibility of the group is not really a strict reflection of the number of votes of the workers involved. Rather it is the possibility of how far support to that group would reflect favourably on the image of the political party concerned. This political visibility has several dimensions. A group firstly has to be visible to itself to feel its distinct identity and appreciate its political importance. The visibility of a particular group to political parties is also a matter of social links between political leaders and members of the group.

For getting political support a group has also to develop means of getting public support for its cause. Political visibility is not only an additional attribute in determining workers' relative status but that it is also the process through which various other qualities of groups of workers get recognition in the form of better or worse working conditions." 49.

189. Self-employed women are in these terms, politically invisible. They have neither a distinct identity, nor political importance. They belong to social classes much inferior to those of the political leaders and have practically no means of getting public support for their cause. Without this political visibility they remain vulnerable to other more politically powerful interests.



190. Here we will describe the State's attitude towards self-employed women and their attempts to organise.

191. The State recognises workers as an important section of the population which tends to be oppressed and exploited by commercial interests. The State recognises the needs to protect these workers and has passed a large number of labour laws. There is extensive government machinery in the form of a Labour Ministry, at the national as well as the State levels, which is set up to enforce these laws. The labour officers and inspectors reaching right down to the Taluka level. Although much of the labour machinery and the labour laws pertain to the formal sector there are a number of laws, which if strictly enforced, will provide simple protection to self-employed women. These include the Minimum Wages Act, the Inter-State-Migrant Labour (protection and welfare) Act., The Contract Labour (regulation & abolition) Act and the Equal Remuneration Act. Not only does the state seek to enforce protection but it also tries to encourage the workers to organise. The Trade Union Act ensures the fundamental right to organise and provides a model for trade union building. The Industrial Disputes Act provides a model for trade union building. The Industrial Disputes Act provides (at least theoretically) protection against victimisation in organising.

192. The State goes one step further and encourages workers to organise by giving them awareness training through the Central Board of Workers' Education. The CBWE with its branches in every state runs classes which informs workers of their rights, and encourages them to unite and to join trade unions. Similarly the National Labour Institute carries out camps of unorganised workers to encourage them to organise.

193. However, inspite of these efforts by the State, self employed workers are left largely unprotected and unorganised. As the Commission has found in its tours, very few, if any, of the labour laws are enforced outside the formal sector, and there are practically no unions which include self-employed workers.

194. One reason is that only very recently have self-employed women begun to be recognised as "workers". It is only in the last 5-6 years that the 'unorganised labour' and rural labour' has been recognised as part of the labour force to be protected by the labour machinery.

195. Another, and more dangerous reason is that when groups of workers organise to seek implementations of labour laws, other agencies of the state tend to side with exploiter, to prevent the organising. The police, for example, see a legitimate demand for minimum wages, or release of bonded labour as a 'law and order' problem and often treat the workers quite brutally, thereby suppressing all motivation to organise.

In the month of April-May 1987, bonded labourers of two villages in Mahboobnagar dist. A.P. submitted petitions for release to the Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO). On submitting petitions, the harassment began – they were beaten, abused, their cattle seized, even the titles on the house of a bonded labourer were removed<sup>50</sup>.

196. Implementation of the labour laws is often seen by certain vested groups as harmful to their economic interests, and they lobby with the government to prevent the implementation. Caught in a conflict of interests the government often backs away from implementation.

"SEWA had organised homebased garment workers in Gujarat" says Dhangaariben, Executive Committee member of SEWA "but we found that they were not included in the schedule and so there was no minimum wage for them. We applied to the state Labour Ministry to notify Minimum Wages. Although the office of the Labour Commissioner prepared the Draft Notification, it never came out. Later on we found out that the All India Garment Manufacturers' Association had submitted a memorandum to the Labour Ministry as well as

Ministry of Industries. Saying that if Minimum Wages was declared they would shift all garment work out of Gujarat State."

197. The State has created a special department to deal with the "Welfare" aspect of society. The social Welfare and social Defence Ministries as well as the Central Social Welfare Board supply this service. These government departments are meant to deal with the weakest, most vulnerable sections of society which include the self-employed women. The original mandate of these departments was to dole out welfare, the idea being that these weak sections cannot help themselves and would always be weak, and so the welfare was a form of 'relief'. However now that concept is changing. There is a growing recognition that 'weak sections' are not by nature weak, but only so because of their position in society. If these weak and vulnerable sections are made more aware, more organised and at the same time are given a helping hand from the government, they too can become strong.

198. The Rural Awareness Camps sponsored by the Central Social Welfare Board are an example of such an approach. These camps try to arouse the poor especially the women, to organise and unite them to better their conditions. Similarly the Ministry of Human Resource Development gives grants to help awareness generation. This kind of support from the government does create an atmosphere for organising. That this approach may be successful is illustrated by SUTRA's organising attempts in HP. Ironically SUTRA's example also shows how the organising attempts of poor women supported by one section of the State, may run into opposition by vested interests supported by another section of the State.

199. In 1985 SUTRA received a grant from the Ministry of Human Resource Development under the title of "Raising Public awareness against alcoholism." They ran a series of village camps at which women were able to discuss the problem that liquor creates in the lives and to learn more about the government's role in licensing and sanctioning the sale of liquor at the state level. These awareness camps were instrumental in mobilising women and initiating anti-liquor campaign and build it into a movement. During their meeting, the women agreed that alcohol was their biggest problem. They put forward the proposal that before any liquor shop is opened a vote should be taken to assess public opinion and that only if the resolution is backed by 2/3 of the population of a village, should a govt. licence a vend at the site.

200. Then in November 86 about 200 women went on a Padyatra from Village Samanu to Simla. In a way, although all these activities were supported by the Central Government, however at the state level the government was trying its best to suppress the movement.

201. The revenue department of the state government directly gains from the sale of liquor. In a study conducted by SUTRA, it was discovered that in 1985 the State Government had earned a sum of Rs.68 crores from the sales of licences alone. Therefore the sale of licenses alone brings in an income equivalent to about Rs.1000 per person. Thus it is a very lucrative business both for the government and for the businessmen. It is no wonder that the Himachal Pradesh excise regulations are framed in such a way that they allow no provision for the closure of a liquor shop once it is licensed for the year, and although there is a paragraph which states that public opinion should be assessed before a licence is granted, there is nothing that makes it incumbent upon the licensing authorities either to assess opinion or to follow its dictate. On the contrary whenever the women have (supported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development) tried to demonstrate their disapproval of the indiscriminate opening of liquor dens & licensing policy, the State authorities have sided with the rich and powerful businessmen who earn high profits from liquor selling and have tried to crush the women's movement.<sup>51</sup>

202. It has been the policy of the state to encourage the poor to develop economic

alternatives by organising themselves into production, consumer and service co-operatives. The cooperative is seen as a form of organising by which the weak and vulnerable can collectively protest against exploitation. The State actively encourages co-operativisation by providing subsidies, soft loans, protected markets etc. The co-operative departments in each state, train co-operative members in the principles of co-operation as well as in the skills of running a co-op., such as management, accounting etc. Recently many states have introduced special incentives for poor women to form co-operatives.

203. Co-operativisation is also encouraged for landless or poor rural people. However, as in the case of the labour laws, the impact of such government support to organise co-operatives, has been negligible. Cooperatives have not been able to serve as the vehicle to organise the weak and vulnerable, especially self-employed women. One reason for this is that although the state started with the good intention of promoting genuine cooperatives, it has smothered these co-operatives to death by over-regulating and over controlling them. The state has attempted to control the co-operatives hereby leaving little room within the co-operatives for the growth and awareness of the poor themselves. Samakhya, a voluntary organisation in Andhra Pradesh which has studied co-operatives in detail concludes :

"Cooperative laws which were of an enabling nature, soon enough changed to those of a controlling nature and in more recent times, when even control was not found to be enough, amendments were made to let cooperatives be managed by government! accountable to government, to be used by government for its schemes. Cooperatives which wish to maintain their autonomy, their sense of accountability to their members do so at considerable risk and often go through the most traumatic experiences, as we in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (to name a few states where cooperatives have been denied elections) will know."<sup>52</sup>

204. It has also been found that when the State encourages organisations of poor women by positive policies, there is an immediate response of organising. A notable example is the G.R. of the Gujarat government reserving all government markets for women's co-operatives. The Govt. of Gujarat has notified that all its purchases will be made only from women's cooperatives. The price for these purchases fixed by a tripartite committee. This policy has encouraged self-employed women to unite and attempt to set up co-operatives and the result has been a growth of small women's co-operatives, numbering more than....all over Gujarat. In addition old co-operatives got a new lease on life and defunct ones were revived.

205. There are two opposite streams of thought within the government itself as to how development should reach the people. One is the 'beneficiary approach'. The government is perceived as the benefactor, the giver and the people are passive and receiver. The government controls, the people are controlled. The approach sees the process as one of ruler and the ruled.

206. The second is the 'involvement approach'. People are perceived of as involved in the process of development. Their needs, their aspirations are reflected in government programmes and their energies, their commitments are involved in the implementation.

207. The last 40 years of development have shown that for the weaker sections such as self employed women the purely beneficiary approach will not work, that unless the vulnerable sections are organised, the fruits of development will not reach them but will be appropriated by the more powerful groups. This recognition has prompted the government at State and National level to promote all kinds of women's organisations—Mahila Mandals, Mahila Samajams, Mahila Sangams etc. However, even within the promotion of women's organisations the different beneficiary or involvement approaches can be observed.

208. A good example of the beneficiary approach to promoting women's organisations is

the UP governments' sponsorship of the women's organisation 'Akanksha'. Akanksha was formed, not by an impulse from any self-employed women, but by a Notification issued by the State government on 1.12.86. As can be seen, this woman's organisation is purely an arm of the government itself.

209. In contrast is the women's Development Programme again of the government of Rajasthan which is based completely on the involvement approach.

The WDP is one of the most significant programmes of the Govt. spread over six districts of Rajasthan covering 300 gram panchayats. It is unique in many ways. For a start, it has brought together the Government voluntary agencies and research groups, a programme in which "the policy makers have adopted a vote of humility".

The Govt. and the voluntary agencies have been working well and with understanding. Officials understand that there are certain aspects, like training, better handled by voluntary workers. And the activists appear to have shed their usual bias to anything to do with the Government. 'Yeh to Sarkari Hai'.

The W.D.P. has three components. There are 'Sathins' at the level of the gram panchayat, with 10 villages looked after by a 'pracheta,' who have a project director, at the district level, all coming under a director of the programme under the Ministry of Social Welfare. It is linked to the Voluntary Component of the Programme IDARA (Information, Development and Research Agency).

Besides the power of their 'Ekat' (Solidarity/Organizing), what helps them in fighting issues like minimum wages in famine relief work is the realization by the local power groups that these women have clout of govt. behind them. A Sathin in a village is not just any body, she is a govt. functionary. This has also enhanced her self-esteem and status in the family and community.

Normally the government approach is to dump information and benefits on the villagers. In the WDP the idea is to create an urge in these women to seek information about their rights and then to exercise them. While in this programme, planning is not cut and dried but incomplete. Experience gained while operationalizing the programme is being constantly incorporated into the planning process.

These women's interventions have made the governments delivery system more effective, be it functioning of a school, a handpump, a primary health centre or a ration shop. They are providing check on the corruption. The result is not only their own development as women, they are also beginning to act as agents of change and could increasingly become, given continued support, a catalyst for effecting a change in social relations.<sup>50</sup>

210. A consistent pattern that emerges is that when the state is sympathetic to the issues of the poor women and supportive to their organising efforts, the women certainly do organise and succeed in their struggles. Government help creates a support structure where none existed before. In a seminar organised by the Ministry of Labour on Organising Unorganised Rural Labour, sponsored by by Ministry of Labour, one of the participants, Rajesh Tandon, reports:

"When the participants (from a rural training camp) described their achievements two factors were almost invariably present in each of them. These two factors were the level of organised action and the degree of support from local officials. The data suggested that the higher the level of organised action and the greater the degree of official support, the better were the chances of success.<sup>51</sup>

211. If we accept that women's problems are not going to be solved in the course of the current type of development, then we are looking for a political solution—a method of giving

additional priority in State Policies to measures for helping these women. As past experience has shown, there is little chance of even existing facilities like education, primary health services or access to capital ever reaching these women at sufficient and sustainable levels unless they build up an organised pressure.

212. Left to voluntary agencies and the poor women's own organised pressure, it is unlikely that these kinds of organisations will come up quickly enough in sufficiently large numbers to make a significant impression on the situation of these women.

213. It is rather ironic to ask the state to support a machinery which is to promote action for change in state policies. However, it is recommended that to create an atmosphere for women's organising, the State should initiate and help in maintaining a network of grassroot level organising efforts, on something like the WDP Rajasthan model.

#### Role of the State

214. The above examples make it clear that if the organising process is to be encouraged among this weakest section of the people it must be supported by the state. When the state, or any agency of the state opposes this process, it almost certainly leads to a breakdown of organising. If the state is to support organisation of self-employed the following suggestionis can be followed:

1. Not to convert a legal demand into a law and order problem

215. The most damaging role that a state agency can play is to accuse a group of agitating women of creating a 'law and order' problem and then arresting them or 'using violence on them. As we have seen this crushes all signs of awareness and strength among the workers. We strongly recommend that when a group of workers agitate non-violently to demand a legal right such as minimum wages, abolition of bonded labour or legal access to land, then the state agencies such as police should abstain from any action against them. If violence is committed on the groups the police should protect and defend them.

2. Support for organising efforts

216. Whenever self-employed women organize, including on the issue of implementation of government programmes, the state should unequivocally support and side with them. By doing so, government programmes will also actually reach the poor. It will also be easier for the state to inter-act with workers and ensure that they remain the focus of all development activities.

3. Orientation of government functionaries to support organizing

217. Apart from support to the poor at the policy-making level, the state should set up mechanisms whereby government functionaries at all levels of the bureaucracy are oriented towards poor women. This orientation would include an understanding of the need to support worker's organizing efforts and ways in which government functionaries could actively support and work with workers.

4. Developing support centres

218. Centres where self-employed women can obtain information on their legal rights, existing government policies and programmes, and the implementation agencies for these should be established by the state. This would assist the organizing efforts of workers by providing access to information. These centres could also be a mechanism for obtaining feedback with regard to women's problems in and needs for organizing.

5. Representation at the Policy-making and planning levels

219. Self-employed women should have proper representation in all policy making and

planning of the nation's development. This will ensure that the concerns and priorities of the poorest of workers will determine the national plans, policies and programmes. It will also mean that plans and policies which encourage consciousness raising and organizing in general will be developed.

6. Creation of legislation

220. Progressive legislation can both initiate and further encourage organizing, as we have discussed earlier. Thus such legislation should be developed in consultation with women workers.

7. Developing legislation for forms of organization

221. Existing legislation pertaining to forms of organization should be reviewed, and changes which will encourage organizing should be made. These changes should include simplification of procedures and regulations. In addition, legislation for alternative forms of organization, more suited to the organizing of poor women, should be developed.

8. Support for training

222. The state should provide resources for training which would assist and encourage the organizing process. Where such resources exist (for example Worker's Education Board and Social Welfare Boards at the Central and state levels) they should be made available to women workers. Workers should determine the kinds of training programmes developed, so that they would be suitable and oriented to their organizing efforts.

9. Support formation of regional or Central association of workers

223. The State should encourage and support the formation of networks and associations of self-employed women workers at regional and national levels. In this way, workers' collective strength for organizing will be enhanced and they will also have an opportunity to inter-act and share their experiences with each other.

10 The Government should reserve raw material and markets for co-operatives of self employed women. This could be done on the line of the Gujarat GR.

224. It is often seen that the government acts or reacts according to political pressures exerted over it, from time to time. In that case that vast majority of the poor self employed women, looking to their present vulnerability and total lack of bargaining power, will never be able to build up neither own political visibility nor the organised strength to pressurise the government for policies in their favour.

225. Therefore, the government should on its own take action to create a positive atmosphere in the country for these women to organise themselves to know, demand and enjoy their rights, given by the government itself, to defend their rightful place in the economy against forces that erode their means of livelihood, to play an active role in decision making and thus participate in the various development processes. It is clear that unless the capabilities of these women are increased, the country will not be able to progress as desired by all of us.

# 9

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Approach

1.1 In the preceding chapters we have made an in-depth study in certain critical areas, detailed recommendations have also been made in respect of those subjects. The Commission had undertaken extensive field visits and interacted with the workers themselves to collect the required information. It also had discussions with experts in many areas and Government representatives of developmental ministries and departments at the Centre and the State. On the basis of the studies and discussions, the main thrust of the recommendations have been put together in this chapter.

1.2 The coverage of the Commission has been extensive, in taking into account the entire gamut of poor labouring women. Though not a homogeneous group by way of caste, class or economic activity, deprivation and discrimination is common to all of them. They suffer from lack of opportunity to work, low and discriminatory wages and exploitative conditions resulting in casualisation. They lack social security, face occupational health hazards, they do not have access to new technologies, skills and knowledge. While making recommendations, the National Commission has made suggestions which should break the vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy, low productivity, discriminatory wages, exploitation subsistence level of existence, large families, poor health and increasing unemployment all leading to greater poverty.

1.3 The preceding chapters of the report clearly establish that all women are workers because they are producers and reproducers. Even when they are not employed, they are involved in socially productive and reproductive labour all of which is absolutely necessary for the survival of society. Women's work as home-makers must be recognized as social/economic production. For, when women fetch water, gather fuel and fodder or tutor their children, they are performing services in the absence of which market services would have to

be purchased. Only if this is recognized, can other consequences flow from it such as a broader definition of women's work.

The National Commission recommends that **all subsequent data collection efforts should enlarge the definition of women workers to include all such activities paid and unpaid performed within the home or outside as an employee or on own account.**

1.4 Enumeration must take into consideration the multidimensional functions of women workers which often vary within the day, from week to week and from season to season.

1.5 Therefore, there can be no straight-jacketed approach to any solution of the problems of women workers. A multi-dimensional flexible, integrated, coordinated and area specific approach must be adopted by the planners and implementers upto the last rung of the delivery system.

1.6 In all planning and decision making/implementing bodies, women's participation should not be in terms of token representation but in proportion to their numbers.

1.7 At the same time, it is essential to attack the underlying factors of exploitation and lopsided control of resources which result in the cycle of poverty, underemployment and unemployment pushing large numbers of the rural and urban poor in the informal sector which, perforce, only permit marginal levels of living. To overcome this, a mechanism must be evolved to give them access to knowledge, skills, resources and materials, without which there is a sense of powerlessness. Although the existing development/fiscal policies in theory do not discriminate against women, however, in reality they have not led to strengthening women. The reasons for this powerlessness are (a) the general image of women as subordinates which is reflected in the implementation of these policies that leads to men becoming the major beneficiaries, (b) the need of vested interests to keep women subordinate in order to exploit their cheap and docile labour. The Commission's Studies has revealed that women when given facilities and resources, have demonstrated high productivity, a better record of repayment of loans, the assets are also safeguarded and not disposed of. The Commission, therefore, recommends that a package of new policies and directives needs to be undertaken. The package should be developed with strategies which counter the existing system favouring the vested interests against the poor and powerless, specially women.

1.8 In discussing various strategies to enhance the economic status of poor women workers, particularly those who are self-employed and in the informal sectors of economy, several strategies have been tried, in both small experimental programmes and large scale national programmes. All these experiences have contributed to the understanding of two inter-related aspects:

i. Women working in the informal sector of economy, be it in the rural or in the urban areas, operate in a vicious circle of subsistence, deprivation and survival. They are largely assetless and do not own any productive assets in relation to their work. Even when some of these assets are held by the family, women's own access to and control over these assets have been largely marginal.

ii. Provision of productive assets in the hands of women, working in the informal sector of the economy, have led to qualitative improvement in their life over a period of time, given other inputs such as knowledge, skill, organization and confidence. This has been shown to be so in the case of women working in rural areas with assets of land, trees, cattle, and related equipment and machinery. This has been shown to be so also for women working in urban areas with assets like tools, equipment, plants, sheds and land.

1.9 It is important to recognise why the provision of such assets in the hands of women, that they have an ownership and control over, helps to substantially improve their economic



situation over a period of time, and vice-versa. Lack of access to, and ownership and control over assets leads to only marginal and transient changes in their economic situation. Several reasons can be seen in this context. First, provision of assets related to the production and work of women helps build long term viability of that economic activity. If women continue to be dependent on others for access to and use of the productive assets, then they continue to be dependent on others for their economic well-being, and interventions focusing on other aspects do not necessarily provide long term viability of their economic activities. Second reason is that provision of productive assets in the hands of women provides for a greater potential for regeneration and recycling. On the basis of some assets women can reproduce and recycle their economic activity in such a way so as to enhance the economic potential. A third aspect is that ownership of and control over productive assets provides a different level of confidence and hope to poor women which is not possible through other interventions. By adding the dimension of longevity and stability in their economic activity, ownership of assets helps to substantially enhance their sense of self-confidence.

1.10 Thus, the Commission strongly recommends that **if we are serious about substantially improving the economic status of poor women working in the informal sectors of economy, we have to devise concrete strategies which can help to enhance the ownership of the control over productive assets by these women. Perhaps, it will be the single most important intervention towards both their empowerment and economic well-being. Some of the assets that women can be given are a plot of land, housing, tree pattas, joint ownership of all assets transferred by the State to the family, animals, licence, bank accounts, membership of organizations and Identity Cards.**

1.11 It is imperative to recognize women's role as major earners of the family and not as marginal and supplementary contributors. At least one-third of the households are solely supported and another one-third receive at least 50 per cent contribution from women. Therefore, while fixing financial and physical targets and allocating of resources this reality should be kept in view. Such households should be specifically identified at the village level and covered by all programmes.

## Planning and Monitoring

2.1 As mentioned earlier women are not only major earners of the family but they also perform necessary functions in the family, like rearing and bearing of children, fetching water, gathering fuel and fodder. These services are not quantified in economic terms, but they do substantially result in economic benefits to the family and the society. The Commission is not in favour of making reservations for women. However, recognising the actual contribution which a woman makes as an economic unit and the fact that for centuries she has been exploited and denied the right to productive resources, women must have all the attention that they deserve on account of their productive and reproductive functions and their numerical strength which is half of the population.

2.2 The National Commission is of the view that the planning processes carried out at all levels, including the Planning Commission and the State Planning Boards do not sharply focus their attention on the realistic situation of labouring women, who are unprotected workers, largely invisible, easy subjects of exploitation, unorganised, illiterate, struggling to survive in adverse conditions and are facing a biased and insensitive administrative machinery at the field level. The macro policies and programmes of the Government have resulted in eroding the employment opportunities of these women while ignoring their urgent needs. Neither the development process of the past decades nor the anti-poverty programmes for women, have

changed this basic situation significantly. Of late, certain adhoc attempts have been made in fixing targets by individual ministries but adhocism is hardly the right approach to deal with such a large section of our population. There are 27 women specific schemes which have been identified by the Government of India. The total outlays on these schemes in the 7th Plan is 2.4 per cent of the total allocation. The gender break-up is not, however, available for the mixed schemes like RLEGP & NREP.

2.3 The Commission, therefore, recommends that allocation of resources have to be enhanced in basic areas like the education, health, rural and small industry, drinking water and housing. In the beginning of the First Plan, it was considered necessary in the interest of the country that certain heavy capital investments be made to provide the necessary infrastructure requirement for development. However, on the basis of experience, if investments are not made in developmental human resources such capital investments become counter-productive. The lessons of the past are evident. The Commission strongly recommends that 50 per cent of the to begin with Plans should be flow to women, but in no case less than 30 per cent.

2.4 The Report fully documents the fact that women perform multifarious activities in the home and outside. Also, their working conditions are closely linked to their living conditions, for example, their homes are at times also their work place and the place to keep the fodder, fuel and animals. The Commission, therefore, recommends that in planning a basic strategy should be evolved the underlying objective of which should be to have an integrated and holistic approach towards tackling women's basic issues. This strategy should aim at-

- (a) ensuring them fuel, fodder and water for meeting their basic requirements.
- (b) strengthening their existing employment by providing appropriate support in the areas of skill, training, credit and marketing.
- (c) protecting their employment in the sectors where it is declining due to technological advancements
- (d) creating new employment opportunities for them locally based on local markets for mass consumption goods
- (e) protecting women workers from casualisation and contractualisation which lead to their exploitation.
- (f) provide supportive services to women like housing, toilets and child care facilities,
- (g) proper and effective implementation of industrial and protective legislations.

To meet these objectives, the first step will be to formulate a set of macro policies in various areas which are well-integrated with each other like-

- (a) this will call for formulation of an integrated strategy for the use of natural resources like land, water and forests keeping in mind the fuel, fodder and water requirements of the poor. For example, irrigation schemes should not destroy land and forests: forest policies should not hurt the interests of the poor and land use policies should aim to meet the fodder requirements of the poor also.
- (b) an integrated strategy for industrial development for the healthy growth the three sectors of industries, namely the large scale sector, the small scale sector and the traditional sector need to be promoted. Expansion of large scale industries, for example, should not result into erosion of employment opportunities of workes women workers.
- (c) the industrial policy will also have to be linked meaningfully with the policy pertaining to natural resources so that the resource use is directed towards creating employment opportunities for the poor, and specially for women and also not deprive them of raw materials at a reasonable price.

- (d) anti-poverty programmes will have to be reformulated in the light of the above policies so that they supplement and complement the development process.

2.5 In view of the above, individual macro policies will have to be modified and strengthened to keep in line with the basic developmental strategy. This will also involve taking care of women's needs. The technology policy, the licensing policy, the credit policy, the policy pertaining to training, marketing and raw materials will all have to be reformulated to meet the new needs. For example, the technology policy will aim at reducing the drudgery of women, improving the skills of women, supporting R and D for designing appropriate tools for women and at improving the access of women to upgraded skills. The credit policy will aim at improving the access of women credit and at supporting women's economic activities.

2.6 The Commission is also of the view that there is a need for administrative initiative to evolve the concept and approach to human resource development if it is to develop the potential of the people which the departments of the Ministry of Human Resource Development serve. The schemes in these Departments need to be reviewed in this context so that there is a coordinated approach in the Ministry resulting in effective flow of benefits to women.

## Monitoring

2.7 The Commission is of the view that in no Ministry/Department of the Government, or semi-government agency, women should be marginalised. If the responsibility of looking after the interests of women is given to one agency, the tendency is that the other agencies do not look upon women as their main responsibility and in the process, women get marginalised. Being aware of this trap and the fact that women should be in the main stream, the Commission strongly recommends that **every agency of the Government should be responsible to ensure that their planned resources and programmes benefit men and women equally. Besides fixing this responsibility, there be a Monitoring Cell in each agency which should be able to monitor and evaluate the utilisation of the resources and the implementation of the programmes vis-a-vis women. Every agency should have this Cell.** However, there should be nodal agencies in the Central and State Governments which could oversee, liaise and push through programmes of other Ministries/Departments relating to women. **To begin with, Monitoring Cells in the Planning Commission and the Department of Women and Child Development in the Government of India, should be strengthened.** The Deptt. of women and Child Development has taken on this task, but it has not yet become very effective. A strategy should be evolved to see how the results of the monitoring and evaluation can be effectively conveyed to the concerned agencies and the necessary changes implemented by them. The Commission recommends that the Department of Women and Child Development should have periodical meetings, not only with the related Central Ministries, but also with the State Governments. Meetings with State Governments could be held at a zonal level (policies and programmes of a number of States in a region could be taken up together).

2.8 More important than the Central Government for the purposes of monitoring are the State Governments. **In the State Governments, the Commission recommends that a Development Commissioner for Women in the rank of the Financial Commissioner should be appointed. He /she should have enough seniority vis-a-vis the other Secretaries looking after development programmes so that he/she can coordinate the activities of other Departments.** This is necessary as women perform multi-faceted activities and they do not always come under one department/agency. Besides, imaginative programmes and projects have to be formulated for them which may cover the purview of more than

one Department. Apart from coordination, review meetings would be held under the Development Commissioner for Women, periodically, besides taking up the responsibility for monitoring. It is understood that after the National Plan of Action (1976) was formulated, the State Governments were asked to set up such Review Committees under the Chairmanship of Chief Secretaries. It is now more than 12 years, but nothing has come of it. The Chief Secretaries are pressed for time, and this matter is of so much importance that it should not be given as additional charge to an officer. If serious attempts have to be made in this direction, then this work should be entrusted full time to a senior officer of the rank of Financial Commissioner only then the other State Secretaries and the Heads of the Departments are likely to respond. Suitable structures have also to be set up at the divisional district levels.

**2.9 Similar, at the district level there should be district-co-ordination officer somewhat equivalent to the status of the District Collector who could be put incharge of planning, monitoring, coordination and evaluation of all programmes affecting women.**

We may take the experience of ICDS which has become acceptable to the people at large and the State Governments, irrespective of their political ideology of the States, because, to begin with, the Central Governments financially aided the state Governments in setting up some posts under the ICDS. The Commission is conscious of the constraint in resources, but would recommend that the Central Government should assist the States in creating such posts at the departmental and district level, otherwise, the tendency is to make one officer additionally in charge of work which does not yield the necessary results. The functionaries entrusted with monitoring work may also be involved in the planning process as needs of women, related to their economic activities, differ from region to region. Like the ICDS, the experiment may be started in a few districts preferably the backward tribal areas.

2.10 In carrying out monitoring and evaluation, the Government functionaries should liaise with voluntary agencies working for women, mahila mandals and representatives of the rural women, to get a proper feed-back of the policies and the programmes affecting them. The communication gap between the delivery system and the affected women needs to be bridged, this will be possible by involving women in planning and monitoring processes at appropriate levels.

## **Employment Policies & Programmes**

3.1 Labouring women in poverty toil not only at home doing multifarious activities, beginning with collection of fuel, fodder, water, household chores, bearing and rearing of children but also work to contribute to the family income. Women in the labour force contribute to family economy and the national economy although this contribution is not recognised. Ninety four per cent of them work in the unorganised sector, 83 per cent participate in agriculture, and other allied activities like dairying animal husbandry, fisheries seri culture, handlooms, handicrafts, forests. A sizeable portion of women are involved in construction activities. Regrettably, women of this sector do not have the necessary visibility and do not get the focus of attention of the planners and implementers.

3.2 As regards women, the strategy should aim at ensuring them fuel, fodder and water for meeting their basic requirements; strengthening their existing employment by providing appropriate support in the areas of skill, training, credit and marketing, protecting their employment in the sectors where it is declining due to technological advancements, creating new employment opportunities for them locally based for the production of mass consumption goods and protecting women workers from casualisation and contractualisation which lead to their exploitation. To meet these objectives, the first step will be to formulate a set of macro policies in various areas which are well integrated with each other.

3.3 The introduction of the new technologies in the primary sectors has led to reducing the areas of women's involvement in the processes of production, forcing them to leave land and their home-based family occupations and to go into other areas like construction, piece-rate workers and akin manual labour, thereby resulting in further deterioration in the status of women. Their living conditions are also worsening, they are joining the ranks of migratory labour having no permanent shelter. The development strategies have practically ignored the contribution of women in the unorganised primary sectors and they have had no positive impact on the conditions of the labouring women who are exposed to a great deal of exploitation because of casualisation, contractualisation and piece-rate work. The Labour Commissioners of the States, do not have the inclination or the time to devote their attention to either the rural or urban unorganised sector, and more than 90 per cent of their time is devoted to barely 10 per cent constituting the organized sector. The labouring women work in pitiable condition with long hours of arduous work and receive discriminatory wages, with practically no social benefits and security. The Commission **recommends the appointment of a separate Labour Commissioner, with supporting field staff, in every State, for the unorganised workers and with due orientation towards the unorganised sector particularly women.**

3.4 The National Commission **recommends that to enlarge the areas of employment for women, to improve their working conditions, to reduce their drudgery and to provide social security, a holistic and integrated approach be adopted. This is specially necessary since women do not perform one action and, therefore, a straight jacket approach cannot be adopted.** The development strategies will have to take note of the existing constraints and biases and discriminations under which women work. The Commission makes the following sectoral recommendations:

#### Agriculture

3.5 Agriculture and allied fields provide the largest sector for women's employment. Fifty one per cent of working women's population is farm labour, engaged in operations such as sowing, weeding, transplantation and harvesting. However, their contribution in these areas is not recognised. Women's access to land ownership is extremely limited. Land reforms have adversely affected the ownership of land by women even in those areas where traditionally women own some land. Women's membership in agro-based co-operatives is negligible. They do not have a say in decision making and in the use of credit technology and marketing. There is wage discrimination. The Commission observed that in certain areas, for the same kind of work, the women would get 3 to 4 rupees per day, while men would get about Rs. 10 as wages. In many areas, minimum wages were not being paid to agricultural labour.

3.6 The Commission recommends that women's contribution to agriculture should be recognised by the policy makers and this should be reflected in the country's Agricultural Policy and Programmes. There should be adequate resource allocation and orientation of programmes for women producers.

3.7 Since women labour involved in agriculture have seasonal work to do, there should be diversification of their activities in areas like horticulture, fruit processing, vegetable growing, animal husbandry and dairying.

3.8 The Commission has also observed that the number of women cultivators is declining. The distribution of surplus land has not gone to the poor women. Such distribution should be followed with concrete steps of providing assistance in improving the land and bringing it into cultivation.

3.9 **The extension services provided in this field should be strengthened. The**

number of women extension workers should be increased. They should help women not only in imparting information on Government schemes under which benefits can be availed of, but should actively assist women in taking advantage of these schemes and training programmes, assisting them to form co-operatives and societies like Mahila Mandals. The number of women extension workers should be increased at all levels and they should be provided information and training on all aspects of women producers' work and data on intra-house distribution of resources. **They should also be provided with infrastructural support by improving the living and working conditions of the female extension staff with better housing, hostel and transport facilities.**

3.10 **The Mahila Mandals should be energised to promote more economic activities and assist women producers to get such inputs as subsidies and fertilisers.**

3.11 Women's co-operatives should be encouraged to involve women in management and decision making. Women's membership should be encouraged in the existing co-operatives.

3.12 **Women should be mentioned as specific target groups for all agricultural development programmes** and efforts should be made to involve them in decision making at all the levels.

3.13 Continuous monitoring should be done of women's programmes so as to improve the programme designing and implementation.

3.14 In the allied sectors of sericulture and animal husbandry dairying, fisheries, forests, handloom and handicrafts, the Commission recommends greater inputs of training and credit and, as in the case of agriculture, women's co-operatives should be encouraged, and they should have greater access to extension workers.

### **Fuel, Fodder and Water**

3.15 Large sections of women in the unorganized sector, living in rural areas, are involved in collection of fuel and fodder. With the process of deforestation, this task has become more strenuous as women have to walk long distances to collect fuel. Non-availability of grazing land has increased their problems. Social forestry was visualised both for satisfying the basic needs of rural households and for reducing pressures on the forests by generating resources for community needs outside the forest land. However, the programme, as implemented, has developed a slant in favour of the larger farmers, urban markets and industries, while the fuel fodder crisis continues to grow. Government policies, in the last few decades, have hastened degradation and privatisation of the common property resources through land allotment policy. Illegal encroachments by large farmers and operation of market forces have led to further deterioration of the state of the common land, affecting women adversely, specially with large tracks of agricultural land being diverted from food crops to cash crops and tree farming for commercial gain. The social forestry programme has not resulted in increased employment opportunities for women.

3.16 The National Commission agrees with the recommendations of the Workshop on Women, Social Forestry and Wasteland Development, held by Centre for Women's Development Studies as reported in their document:

1. If Social Forestry or Wasteland Development is to provide economic independence for women, **it is essential to build in adequate wage and other technical/managerial support through the period of rearing, maintenance and protection of the plants.**
2. The basic aim of social forestry should be to create village woodlots on a sustained yield basis which will yield resources according to village needs.

3. Any social forestry programme which allows for clear felling of village woodlots must be avoided and only rotational harvesting should be permitted and need-based cutting cycle should be worked out
4. **All social forestry programmes should be simultaneously agro-forestry programmes of which multi-layering and multi-cropping should be essential features, as per the local situation, to provide for both short and long term returns since the poor cannot wait for long. Species should be selected which compliment each other rather than compete for nutrients.**
5. The planning for social forestry programme should be based on a long-term perspective rather than short term perspective.
6. **Women's access to productive resources under social forestry programmes should be backed by State marketing supports.** The market structure for their products, under social forestry programmes, are controlled by distant monopolistic agencies and intermediaries which deprive them of their just returns. To ensure their participation, as equal partners in this nationally vital activity, it is essential to guarantee strong and effective State support in the marketing of their products.
7. Direct benefits to women are in the form of wages. In consideration of the short term nature of the employment, and in view of the high financial output of the projects, the wages must be upwardly revised.
8. In all kinds of social forestry/wasteland development programmes, budget lines must include provisions for the development of women's organisations.
9. Review of forest regulations is needed to make possible the achievement of social forestry goals.
10. **Creation of tanks for water grown plants, and multi-layered useful plants below and above the soil, should be the basic strategy** in community controlled and community managed social forestry systems for involvement of women.
11. Equitable distribution of all products of social forestry like water, grass, fuel, fodder, fruits, tubercrops and timber will ensure community participation particularly by womenfolk who are hard hit from environmental changes.
12. An effective and powerful supporting infrastructure for developing effective models of investment, management, protection, just distribution should be created at grassroots level for minimising drought, flood, unemployment, poverty and ensuring rural prosperity.
13. **A number of such experimental models be developed with total participation of village Mahila Mandals and Governmental functionaries, local people and various non-governmental agencies working at grassroots level for which support system should be ensured.**
14. This can generate a cyclical process for creating employment and resources which will have a demonstration effect. The funds generated could be ploughed back to make such projects self-sustaining, thus strengthening women's participation on a continuous basis.

## Water

3.17 Though there are close links between forestry, agriculture, food production and water resources management systems, the macro policies of our Government which govern the use of these resources, are based on compartmentalised approaches to agriculture, forestry and water. For example, irrigation dams collect water for irrigation but also result in waterlogging and salination of land on the one hand, and cutting down of forests and displacement of thousands of people from submerged lands on the other. The policies

pertaining to the use of natural resources have not remained complementary and supplementary to each other. The result is that policy in one sector has adversely affected the other sectors which has deprived the poor of their life support systems and their resource base.

3.18 In the area of water resource development, major irrigation projects have not yielded expected results. The extent of utilization of irrigation potential has been low. The cost of irrigation projects rises to prohibitive levels due to delay in implementation. The construction of large irrigation projects have led to the displacement of the poor without land compensation which has affected the women adversely.

3.19 The National Commission recommends that **more resources should be put into watershed management areas and projects, with involvement of women, which will increase their opportunities of employment.** Similarly caution should be exercised in construction of irrigation dams and **there should always be land compensation for the poor instead of cash compensation as with cash compensation they get permanently deprived of their livelihood.**

3.20 The problem of safe drinking water is very acute. Poor women have to spend a number of hours everyday and have to walk long distances to fetch water. This responsibility is exclusively theirs. The Commission, therefore, recommends accelerated thrust on providing water to villages. At present, 40 per cent of the villages are 'problem' villages with none or remotely located water sources. There should be increased plan allocation for providing drinking water to villages, and stepping up of implementation of the programmes, as water is a basic right, of women. Non-availability of it adds to their drudgery, and ill-health besides denying them a few hours daily which could be profitably used in income generating activities.

3.21 Women should be effectively involved in water storage, keeping in view the local conditions. The traditional methods of rainwater storage/conservation for drinking should be revived, improved and implemented.

3.22 The emphasis must be on recharging groundwater sources for sustainable use. Storage facilities (tanks, reservoirs) at the household level must be expanded, viable schemes for providing piped water in homes should be explored.

3.23 Effective water management in conjunction with management of our other natural resources is essential if we are to avert complete disaster. Local level Mahila Mandals should be effectively involved in the water management at the level of implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

## **Construction Workers**

3.24 A sizeable proportion of women in the unorganised sector is engaged in construction work. The condition of women construction workers is pitiable. They face instability and insecurity of employment, low wages, non-observance of labour laws, bondage to the middleman who employs them without providing the facilities enjoined by legislation. Their way of life is perpetually in a state of flux as they have to keep migrating from site to site. The average wages for women construction workers are generally lower than their male counterparts. Further, women construction workers are almost always totally unskilled. There is no rational explanation why this should be so, since masonry or carpentry are not skills that are likely to require more physical process than the type of 'unskilled' work women normally carry out.

3.25 The National Commission recommends the following measures to elevate the working and living conditions of women construction workers—

- 1 **There is need for much more stringent observance of existing labour laws with**



**deterrent penalty clauses. There is unquestionable evidence from virtually all available studies on construction workers that there is flagrant violation of statutory provision** regarding payment of wages, safety regulations, provision of housing, medical and other facilities, payment of travel expenses for migrant workers compensation for accidents; sickness insurance and so on. Such violations need to be made punishable by law with strict penalties attached to them. In this context, it is necessary to provide legal literacy to construction workers, especially to women who also have special needs such as creches, maternity benefits and toilets.

- 2 **The judicial procedures relating to non-observance of such laws have to be considerably simplified to ensure that the organised workers can obtain legal redress without undue harassment. The cooperation of voluntary organizations and people's action groups may be useful in this regard.**
- 3 Much of the problem of non-implementation of legal provision can be traced to the institution of the labour contractor and middleman. **The government should gradually take over the function of recruitment and registration of workers on the lines suggested in the Construction workers (Regulation of Employment, Security and Welfare) Scheme, 1986.**
- 4 Efforts should be directed at the national level on devising tools, equipments and technology that make the jobs performed by unskilled women workers in construction less hazardous and more energy saving.
- 5 **Special care should be taken to impart skills like masonry and carpentry to women workers under government initiatives.** This is necessary to break the seemingly existing taboos against women acquiring special skills in this industry. Initially, priority in employment may be given to such trained women in government construction sites, the idea being that in a situation of emerging excess demand for such skills, especially in urban markets, there will be no dearth of demand in the market for their skills in due course.
- 6 There should be **a statutory provision for contribution by the contractors to the extent of 10% of net earnings towards a Construction Workers Welfare fund.** The proceeds of this fund should be utilized in building up camping grounds with basic community medical and health facilities in all cities and townships. These can be used to house the workers. Given such an infrastructure, many of the existing statutes regarding the provision of various facilities to the workers, which are being flagrantly violated now, will be automatically taken care of. **Voluntary institutions like the Mobile Creches may be adequately supported in terms of infrastructure and finance to enable them to extend their operations over a number of cities and townships,** so that a large number of these women and children can be reached and a measure of stability is imparted to their home situation.
- 7 Although there are legislative provisions, women construction workers are by and large not provided facilities like creches, maternity benefits, ration cards, toilets and clean drinking water. The implementation machinery should be strengthened to ensure that the facilities due to them are provided.
- 8 Finally, the value of community awareness and organisation for the poor cannot be over emphasised. To start with, the government can help in the process by providing assistance on worksites, for nonformal education, legal literacy, health care and child-care and encouragement for the formation of various community groups and workers' organisations and supporting NGOs to extend their operations among construction workers in general and women workers in particular.

## Industrialisation

3.26 As far as industrial policy and programmes is concerned the encouragement given to the small sector has led to splitting of large units in small ones, contracting and subcontracting by large units, and the growth of home based industries. These forms of production are used as tools of avoiding labour laws and as means of exploiting workers. In this situation of exploitation, women have suffered more. The employment of women in the traditional household sector has been affected by severe competition from mass produced consumer goods. Household industries face a serious problem of markets, raw materials and credit. Women are dominant in contract system as piece-rate workers. They work for long hours without the benefits of leave, holidays and permanency of work and get very low wages. Women labour in factories are also subject to casualization, contractualization and temporary employment. Although, women have been guaranteed legally certain maternity benefits, equal remuneration and child care facilities, in reality, they are deprived of them. Industrialization has not resulted in any significant occupational diversification of female labour force in the economy. Women dominate in the low-skill work area and their role in management and decision making is very limited. The commission recommends.

- 1 The formation of an integrated industrial policy for all sectors and regulation of the use of high technology in various industries, because it has been seen to adversely affect women's employment.

- 2 Attempts should be made to identify industries in the small scale sector which can help women to become self-employed. Industries based on labour intensive technology should be encouraged.

- 3 **Serious attempts should be made to upgrade the traditional sector and to expand women's employment in the sector (which include rural artisan work, cottage industries and other household industries), by providing adequate support in the areas of technology upgradation, training, credit, raw materials, and marketing.** A decentralised approach in providing these facilities will help considerably in the expansion of women's employment in these sectors. It must also be mentioned that the focus here should be on producing goods of mass consumption.

3.27 The State Handicrafts Boards do assist artisans to a certain extent by buying their products. But beyond that the Boards have no relationship with the life of the artisans and craftsmen, particularly women. **The national Commission finds it important to have a national policy on craftsmen to be framed, ensuring a fair return for their work and self-respecting conditions of work and living.**

3.28 Realising the urgent need of social security for craftswomen the Commission recommends that:

- 1 As their homes are their workplaces, proper housing and workshed should be provided, specially to women as craftsmen are all home-based. Housing also adds to the security of women's lives.
- 2 General Insurance Companies should be roped in to devise suitable insurance against critical days of maternity, incapability, illness and old age.
- 3 For award winners, introduction of monthly income scheme under the Unit Trust may be explored
- 4 A central fund may be created for medical care of the ailing artisans and craftsmen/women.

The following specific steps may be taken

- (i) Micro-level data collection regarding various aspects of "handicrafts"

- (ii) Government's support to help units in the initial stages.
- (iii) Treatment of handicrafts and rural artisan work as industry.
- (iv) Creating mass scale marketing for handicrafts, and
- (v) State level policies for state specific crafts.

3.29 The country earns annual foreign exchange close to rupees one thousand crore for handicrafts, handloom and readymade garments where women contribute to a very large extent. The Commission is of the view that there is ample scope and justification for investment in providing social security and welfare scheme for women artisans and craftsmen/women of our country.

5 The **handloom sector** is a very important sector from the point of view of the present as well as the potential employment of female labour. The handloom weavers who have worked as household labour for a master weaver under the traditional jajmani system find it difficult to organise themselves into a cooperative structure.

3.30 To take the benefit of the various promotional schemes of the Government, they face like major problems inadequate, untimely and irregular supply of working funds from the Cooperative Banks which are more attuned to the needs of agricultural sector; the subsidies for loans and rebate are not released in time and in sequence, resulting in unsmooth running of the cooperative; nonrecognition of women's pre-weaving and post-weaving work as 'work', hence they are ignored by the present cooperatives, and government development and welfare programmes.

The Commission, therefore, recommends:

- 1 The District Industries Centres and District Cooperative Banks jointly prepare a business plan' for each handloom cooperative, in consultation with the members, women included.
- 2 The District Industries Centres should accordingly put demand for the necessary funds, well in time, from the Government banks, and Nabard.
- 3 To adopt region specific measures viz. establishing of spinning capacity in the region, technological upgradation of looms, transport subsidy and linkages with outside markets.

3.31 The industry, at present, is facing a number of problems in the areas of technology, raw materials, and marketing organization. In addition to removing these constraints, there is a need to take the following specific steps to help women workers:

- 1 Sensitisation of the concerned staff to take care of women's needs,
- 2 Promotional projects and schemes to indicate increase in income and employment of women,
- 3 Training of women in weaving,
- 4 Improved technologies for the tasks handled by women,
- 5 Facilities like creches and maternity benefits to support their employment,
- 6 **All the women who do pre-weaving in the households should be immediately enrolled as members of the cooperatives to cover them under economic and welfare schemes'** and
- 7 Formation of women weavers cooperatives.

3.32 **Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)** is an important instrument to reduce rural poverty and promote women's development. However certain drastic changes are required to the approach structuring and management of the KVIC.

- 1 At present, the women are involved in activities like making aggarabattis and papad rolling which are comparatively less paid than activities in which men are involved

KVIC should correct this distortion and promote women taking up trades bringing in higher income like hand made papers and weaving.

- 1 KVIC should provide support services like child care, elementary education, health and family planning. It should provide employment generation through organization of actual producers or workers, and it should raise awareness among women about their rights and responsibilities to enhance their general participation in all fields of national development. Secondly, KVIC and KVIB programmes should be directed to poor women belonging to low castes, including the SC/ST. Further, KVIC should also involve women in supervision and management also, so that women workers do not remain only in the subordinate or secondary position.

3.33 As far as **small industry sector** is concerned, attempts should be made to strengthen it economically and steps should be taken to protect women workers of this sector from various types of exploitation:-

- 1 Labour laws should be enacted to cover contract and sub-contract workers, homebased workers and seasonal workers.
- 2 Appropriate laws should be formulated to protect home-based workers from different types of exploitation.
- 3 Strict observation of labour laws should be insisted in the small factory sector, including seasonal factories.
- 4 The laws regarding permanency should be strictly enforced in this sector. To start with, all public sector units should provide permanency of job to their workers.

3.34 **Licensing policy**, which is intended to regulate the production of goods and services in the economy has remained gender neutral, thereby not paying much attention to the male/female division of labour in the economy and the specific requirements of female workers. It has, therefore, created an adverse effect on women's employment.

3.35 The licensing policy, like the industrial policy, needs to be examined from the point of view of employment generation for the masses of the poor, including poor women **it should also consciously incorporate the gender factor so that large scale erosion of employment opportunities for women is prevented.**

3.36 Whenever **large industries sub-contract work** to women, who do it in their own houses, it is necessary that the employer **does not evade his legal obligations to provide the benefits** which would have accrued had the women worked in his establishment. There is also use of water, space, electricity or other means of lighting, which should be compensated to the home based contract workers. In the villages, or where space is available in urban centre, common sheds may be built for and by women. **Women should be encouraged to work in common sheds to improve their work status and build up solidarity.**

### Credit, Raw Material and Marketing

3.37 A fairly large portion of the female work force in the informal sector is engaged in activities of a self-employed nature. There are numerous such activities in which the capital investment is not high and there is no recognised employer employee relationship. Such women usually work with their families on piece-rate work.

3.38 There are certain common problems faced by women in this portion of the self-employed and informal sector like lack of access to raw material, credit and marketing facilities and inadequate knowledge of the market demands. All too often, the end product **does not have the finishing touch and the eye for detail is missing.** Women are further handicapped by lack of child care facilities, inadequate work place with poor ventilation and

lighting facilities, poor skills, and lack of training. They tend to get exploited by the middlemen and have to pay exorbitant rates of interest on the small loans that they manage to get. In such a situation, women doing their own account work get gradually weeded out and become casual labour or piece rate workers. Similar is the story of women who are working in the primary sector of agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy, sericulture, handlooms and handicrafts. Instead of strengthening their activities, and in certain cases supplementing their income by doing own account work, they are forced to swell the ranks of the labour force which, in many cases, is in the nature of casual labour or piece rate workers leading further to deterioration in their economic status.

3.39 One of **the most critical components of women's advancement in the economic field is the availability of credit. In the present system, the women do not have access to easy credit even if the amount is very small. In spite of the Reserve Bank's instructions that no security is required for loans upto Rs. 5,000/-, collateral is generally asked for in the case of women.** An analysis of the existing mainline credit schemes for the poor show that not only are poor women marginalised, but the poor as a class do not have easy access to credit. Instead, politicisation of these loans has managed to give the poor a bad name as defaulters.

3.40 Women are marginalised either because of class handicaps such as illiteracy, lack of information and low self-confidence, or gender handicaps, such as attitudinal discrimination, low mobility and lack of asset ownership. The money-lender is a very real part of their lives as a source for both consumption and production credit. They have a complex financial arrangement with him. Banks are still very much a taboo. IRDP, DRI and SEPUP do not even average a 20 per cent coverage of women loanees. In effect, the banks have remained totally off-limits. The only instances where the banks have been successfully tapped is when voluntary agencies such as Annapurna and Working Womens Forum have acted as intermediaries for women of this class.

#### A Credit

3.41 The Commission recommends that the banking policy needs to be implemented in favour of women with **greater amount of flexibility.** It would assist women further **if banks have counters exclusively for women and extension workers to help them.** Banks managed by women have proved to be more advantageous and within the reach of women. **Opening of women's co-operative banks should be promoted.**

3.42 The Commission is of the opinion that it will be beneficial to women, if, apart from giving individual loans, these are advanced to or **through agencies with which women have dealings like Mahila Mandals, women's groups, Anganwadi workers, State Advisory Boards and Women's Development Corporations.** These bodies can also be channelized for getting the paperwork completed. The entire loan should be given in the name of the individuals through bank pass books. These loans could be advanced from the banks according to the exsisting procedures.

3.43 The quantum of loans given to women **should be assessed realistically keeping in view their needs.** Giving loans of a lesser amount is self-defeating. For example, if a **viable** dairy project requires a minimum of two buffalows, and if a loan is given for only one buffalo the project will not be viable, the Commission, therefore, recommends that no blanket ceiling for loans for the poor should not be made, and the ceiling should have certain flexibility. Loans should be combined with a component of subsidy.

3.44 The Commission would like to mention that vendors normally want very small loans per day or per week to buy food, vegetables and other perishable items. For such loans, it is not possible for them to go to the banks. **The Government should, therefore, devise suitable**

**channels through which such loans to petty vendors can be disbursed.** Women's banks, Cooperative banks and voluntary agencies, having experience in this field, may be used as channels for disbursement. Other channels should be identified keeping in view the state variations relating to the existing infrastructures.

3.45 The Commission has noticed that **if the husband has been a defaulter, the woman is disqualified from getting loans. This needs to be reviewed** as, in many cases, the default by the husband may be due to factors like non-viability of the project and inadequate amount of loans. In some cases, husbands may be genuine defaulters, misusing the amount, thereby pushing the family in greater distress. For this very reason, the women may want to take loans. The project should be screened, and if it is seen that the woman is not being used as a screen for a further loan by the husband, **it would not be proper to deprive the wife from taking the loan because the husband is a defaulter.**

3.46 The Commission has also observed that when a person takes a loan for the first time, he or she may already be in debt and such loans taken are used for wiping out the existing debts, which may be amounts due to the money lender, rather than starting a new venture. The Commission strongly recommends that the economic status of a loanee should be taken into account and the amount sanctioned should be such that a portion of it may be used for wiping out the debt as only then can economic ventures be started. A realistic and human approach by the banking, financial and other institutions will help poorest of the poor women.

3.47 The National Commission recommends innovations in the credit mechanism to assist poor women who are unfamiliar with the complexities of institutional finance. The Commission strongly **recommends the need for setting up an exclusive credit body for poor and self-employed women, in recognition of their socio-economic realities. It is also a recognition of the inability of the existing institutionalised credit systems to cater for the needs of women workers.**

3.48 Poor women, in the rural and urban economies cater for themselves. Their labour are exploited to sustain the national economy and, yet, their productivity is not recorded or reflected anywhere. Taking note of the critical socio-economic contribution of this sub-group there is a need for the creation of an institution which can act as a two way catalyst. Even as this credit body facilitates growth for its participants, the clear aim should be that they are raised in national visibility as a powerful and productive group. Organisations such as SEWA (Ahmedabad), WWF (Madras), Samakhya (Hyderabad), Annapuran Mahila Mandal (Bombay) have designed scientific credit experiments for rural and urban women in this class.

3.49 **Since the voluntary sector has unequivocally proved its activeness in delivering credit to this target sector the proposed national credit body must aim to support such organisations. Rather than take on a bureaucratic size and a cumbersome operation of operating loaning windows over the country, this body can support the voluntary organisations which can further loan to the target sector.**

3.50 The proposed credit body can, through loans and grants, improve the equity base of the voluntary organisations providing loans to them on soft term basis. It can also be instrumental in initiating many more voluntary experiments all over the country. This would require a research and development cell in the body which can study all existing experiments and build a model for replication. Trainers can then help more organisations to adopt these credit schemes for which the seed capital and loan can come from the credit body.

3.51 This body can also support government credit bodies such as Women's Development and Finance Corporation. It can also act as an important forum for dialogue between the organised credit institutions and the voluntary agencies Since it will be the most

comprehensive credit effort for women of this class, this body can be a major influence on mainstream credit policies for poor women.

3.52 **Ownership and management of this institution should represent voluntary sector largely.** Poor women can directly be shareholders of this organisation which can be headed by a trust. Management can be entrusted to professionals while a board of directors oversees the legislative and policy aspects of the institution. Once again the directors must represent a cross section of persons who have direct experience in this area.

3.53 In Madhya Pradesh, the State Government has levied a duty of one paise on every unit of electricity consumed, which will help it to raise about rupees nine crores annually. This is being used to support a Welfare and Development Fund for Women. More such experiments need to be taken up in the country.

#### B. Raw Materials

3.54 Raw material is the biggest problem of artisans and crafts-women. The raw material they need is usually in short supply and expensive. They buy the raw material from retailers at high prices and sell the finished goods to common people with low purchasing power. Hence, in spite of having marketable skill, the artisan's own margin of profit remains very low. It is common observation, that artisans earn less than vendors or even labourers.

3.56 Therefore, the Commission recommends a policy that, **the actual producers and artisans should have the first claim to the raw materials like yarn, bamboo, scrap, or tendu leaves and a quota should be reserved for them.**

3.57 Where raw materials are not easily accessible, alternative channels should be identified through which good quality raw material would be procured at reasonable prices.

#### C. Marketing

3.58 A large section of women doing their own work or family occupation face the problem of marketing their products. The same products which earlier had a home market now seem to be squeezed out as a result of mass production of consumer goods, competition, stagnation in designing and quality. Sometimes, women are forced to make distress sales. Their major marketing channels are in haats and weekly markets which are now being flushed by mass produced goods. Non-availability of a network of marketing facilities is one of the important obstacles to the advancement of these women. To deal with this problem, several alternatives have to be worked out.

3.59 The Commission recommends the following agencies which can be used as marketing outlets and also assist, if necessary, in acquiring credit and raw materials:

1. Consumer societies, and consumer federations.
2. Cooperative Societies, and Cooperative Federations.
3. Super markets.
4. State Emporia.
5. Setting up of Government depots for a cluster of villages which could supply raw materials, if necessary, and collect finished products from women to be supplied to agencies with whom marketing tie-ups have been made.

3.60 While the above are actual marketing outlets, other agencies should be identified which can assist the women in identifying markets. These agencies may be the State Advisory Boards, the Women's Development Corporations and voluntary agencies of known experience. In addition, regional marketing centres, having jurisdiction over a few districts, may be set up. At the State level, there should be a Marketing Federation which should have various channels supporting it as mentioned above.

3.61 The role of the Divisional Centres and State Federations should be a mix of promotion and active intervention.

#### Promotional Role

- (1) Advise women to take up activities in the areas where there is a demand for them, such activities could be existing activities, adaptations of the existing activities, or new activities.
- (2) Guide women to get credit from banks and also to find a method for credit guarantee.
- (3) Advise women on designing and on the use of certain modern technologies which would improve the quality of the end product.
- (4) Advise women for starting their own cooperatives or any other form of marketing organisations.
- (5) Counsel women how to get loans for making their own houses to be used as production centres, or common work places.
- (6) Link up health insurance for the women with the concerned agencies and also be a watch-dog for implementation of health insurance schemes and other welfare schemes.
- (7) Advise women regarding the availability of the benefits for upgradation of educational and vocational skills.

#### Areas of Active Intervention

- (1) Provide a network of marketing outlets.
- (2) Provide expertise in finishing a product to be marketed.
- (3) Give training to peer leaders in managerial skills.
- (4) Give training to identified groups of women in the application of new technologies.

3.62. The **infrastructural facilities** as suggested above need to be professional with a lot of flexibility. The Regional Centres and State Federations should not be tied down to rigid procedures, rules and regulations. Preferably, the State Federation should be an autonomous body with persons having managerial skills and expertise in marketing, designing and training. Wherever there are voluntary agencies of repute, which are willing to take up this activity, they could be assisted to set up such centres. Alternatively, where there are professional business houses or departmental centres like the weavers centre, they could be identified. It will have to depend upon the work ethos of each State which will ultimately decide the type of body which should be set up. **The guiding principles should be professionalism and flexibility.** The persons who will man the centres, to begin with, will have to be hand picked and well trained.

3.63. In the beginning, such an infrastructural facility may be provided on an experimental basis in a few States and in a few districts with about 5 to 6 identified trades. If the experiment is successful, it may be replicated. A system will have to be evolved where they will become financially self-sustaining. For effective intervention in each area, **extension service at women's doorstep is the most essential component.** Therefore, we **recommend a well designed effective extension service on the line of T & V service in agriculture.** If services are provided free, they may not be taken seriously. A certain charge, should be levied on women who get the benefit of it. However, it will have to be ensured that, with the help of the services provided, the emoluments of the women should become higher and from which they may contribute a small portion of this to the centre. This could be supplemented by either Government grants or supported by financial institutions to make the institutions financially self-sustaining.

#### Apex Body

3.64. At the State level, an Advisory Committee, having representatives of finance,



professional management experts and consultants, representatives of the Government from the administrative department and finance department and representatives from voluntary agencies may be constituted. The Committee should be a standing committee with a fixed term, to be renewed or changed by rotation. This body may lay down broad policy guidelines and also assist the Divisional Centres in getting cooperation from various agencies such as the Government, training institutes, professional institutes, and private marketing agencies. This body will also review the work of the Centres and advise if new trades are to be added or certain trades to be dropped, in short, it will decide on the functional role of the Divisional Centres, **leaving the Centres with a great deal of flexibility of autonomy.**

3.65. At the Central level, a similar Advisory Committee, as at the State level, should be set up to assist the Department of Women and Child Development. This body will review the work of the Divisional Centres, undertake periodic evaluations, decide on the future growth of such Centres and replicate the models of successful Centres.

3.66. **The Government itself can provide marketing facilities to women as it makes extensive purchase of goods and services during the course of the year which could be supplied by women.** Goods may be supplied by Mahila Mandals, women's cooperatives or District Divisional Centre like uniforms, envelopes, file covers, brooms, baskets, chalks, exercise books, bandages, bed sheets and other simple equipment for hospitals, educational kits even vegetables, fruits, eggs and fish and also render services like cleaning, washing, cooking, catering, printing, stitching, binding and the like. **These purchases could be done from women groups directly by the State Governments as is being done in Gujarat or through the Women's Development Corporations as is being done in Punjab.** In Gujarat, the State Government has also set up a pricing committee to fix prices for goods and services purchased from women. This committee meets periodically to review the prices. Such a support will strengthen the women's co-operatives and other groups.

#### Space and Transport

3.67. In addition to credit, raw-materials and marketing, two additional inputs need to be provided to improve the status of such workers, namely, space and transport facilities. The small producers both in the urban and rural areas normally lack space to serve as work places as well. Ventilation and lighting facilities are almost lacking. In the market places, vendors do not normally get licences for want of space and they are pushed and harassed by the police and municipal authorities, who, at times, demand bribes in cash or kind. The National Commission **recommends that the critical needs of women producers and vendors should be taken into account by the authorities. Common workplaces should be provided, both in the rural and urban areas,** having space, ventilation, water and toilet facilities. This should be assisted under the NREP Programme. In addition, a new allocation should also be made.

3.68. Similarly, for marketing their products, places should be earmarked (e.g. school compounds in the evening) and licences given. In Manipur, they have the women's traditional market, an experiment which is very successful and needs to be widely emulated. **In cities, certain areas, certain timings, and days should be earmarked where vehicles should not be allowed,** this may give relief to the small vendors by providing market area, thus promoting them instead of treating them as objects of nuisance.

3.69. The producers usually carry their products on their heads to the weekly haats or from the village to the city. The strain of this work quickly tells on their health. The small amount of goods they produce makes it uneconomical for them to hire transport, so they have to use the public transport system. Usually, they are deprived of access to public buses or

trains or have to pay a bribe to use them. In Kerala, women engaged in fisheries have to pay exorbitant hire charges for the taxis as any delay in transporting fish to their homes or market places would lead to the fish getting spoiled. Since they have no access to transportation, they buy fish from the middlemen at a higher price. Similarly, there are other easily perishable commodities like flowers which cannot be retained for some time before they are marketed. The National Commission recommends that **attention may be paid for providing adequate and specially designed transport facilities for these workers.**

## **Women in Processing/Industrial Occupations**

### **Mining**

3.70. In the mining industry, the employment of women has reduced with the banning of underground work and night work by them. However, with the nationalisation of coal mines, there has been a somewhat upward trend in their employment. These workers also face the problems of very low percentage of permanent workers; predominance of women workers as contract workers in unskilled areas; low wages; serious health hazards; bonded labour and flagrant violation of labour laws. The Voluntary Retirement Scheme has been devised solely to reduce the presence of women in mining. It is not devised to reduce the number of manual workers, as it is offered to women only. This practice is in total violation of the right of equality guaranteed under the Constitution.

The Commission therefore, strongly recommends that—

- (1) The **practice of Voluntary Retirement should be stopped** forthwith.
- (2) In order to prevent the number of women declining in the mining industry, the Commission recommends that **Women relatives should have claim on the women's job on her retirement**, and not a male member of the family.
- (3) Regarding mechanisation in the mining, the Commission observes that mechanisation, even if brought in, should be done with proper understanding of financial vis a vis human cost. It is observed that certain process where mechanisation is brought in, has proved financially more costly, e.g. shale picking, in coals mines which is mainly done by women only. Therefore, the Commission recommends that such processes should be left to be done manually by women, this will increase their employment opportunities and also cut out the financial costs.
- (4) The number of women workers as permanent workers should be increased.
- (5) The interests of women workers in mines should be safeguarded and there should be strict enforcement of labour laws.
- (6) Skilled training should be imparted to women workers so that they could get higher wages.
- (7) Simple precautionary health saving devices like gloves, helmets, special shoes should be provided by the employers compulsarily to protect the head, eyes, hand and feet of women.
- (8) The Welfare programmes for women workers will get a fillip if increasing number of women are appointed as welfare officers.

### **Fisher Women**

3.71. The National Commission, on its tours, met a large number of fisher women whose conditions are pitiable. Women are traditionally indispensable members of the fishing community, involved in all fishing operations like processing, drying and curing, loading/unloading and net making. The basic problem arises from the perishable nature of fish, poor and costly transport facility which does not allow them to buy fish directly from the fish

centres, and competition from modern fishing units. The Commission, therefore, recommends:

- (1) Protection and **regeneration of fish resources.**
- (2) Recognition of their **status as workers**, and provision of licenses.
- (3) Protective legislation for better wages and working conditions, and social security, benefits (the importance of this may be associated from the fact that while infant mortality for Kerala State is 32 per 1,000, in the coastal belt it is 180 per 1,000).
- (4). Reversal of **high-technology, export oriented trends**, that erode their livelihood, **without providing alternatives** other than marginalisation as highly exploited wage labour.
- (5) Access to **credit facilities.**

3.72. Similar recommendations will apply to women workers in the garment industry, tobacco processing, food processing, rag pickers, sericulture, silk industry and factory workers. All these workers need to be made visible by the planners. Apart from strict enforcement of legislation, new legislation is also called for. They need to be organised and taken into fold of trade unions.

3.73. As some processing workers may be self-employed such as garment workers, and rag pickers, credit, raw materials and marketing facilities are required. Recommendations on such facilities have been given in the section under Credit, Raw Materials and Marketing.

### Food Processing

3.74. Women have traditionally been involved in food processing for family consumption. These skills are, therefore, easily tapped when the need for generation of additional family income is felt. Most often, however, due to the lack of capital and organizational skills, the scale of their business is too small to ensure adequate profits and most women in this industry are not own-account workers, but victims of sub-contracting and putting out systems. Women labour is clearly preferred as they can be paid very little and are less prone to making demands than men, 40 to 50 per cent of the women do not get regular work, which results in economic hardship and insecurity further eroding women's ability to demand and fight for improvements. There are some women's organizations in this industry, but it is a pity that most of them are not commercially viable and therefore the benefit to the women workers is minimal.

3.75. The National Commission makes the following recommendations for improvements in the lives of women workers in food industry.

1. Proliferation of sub-contracting must be checked and application of labour laws assured.

2. Women should be encouraged to avail of credit facilities to set up production units on their own that are of a size and scale to allow for profits and, therefore, steady income for all.

3.76. For this, they should be reached by women extension workers from relevant departments and given training, especially in organizational and managerial skills, like marketing and accounting, as well as in leadership and awareness building.

### Forest Workers

3.77. The Forestry sector provides employment to 0.2 per cent of the rural population, about 80 per cent of them are estimated to be women, and children. They get employment in collection and process of minor forest produce, and afforestation. Besides employment, the minor forest produce also provides food and income during the lean season to the forest dwellers, mainly tribals. Though officially 'minor', as it earns less revenue, but for the forest dwellers, the minor forest produce is a major source of income in the months of starvation.

About 60 per cent production of minor forest produce is utilised as food. In Orissa, 13 per cent of the forest population depends exclusively on collection of minor produce, 17 per cent as wage labour in forestry. In Panchmahals, 35 per cent of the total earnings of tribals are from minor forest produce collection. Collection of tendu leaves provides 90 days employment to 75 lacks women every year.

3.78. To ensure them better price, produce like tendu leaves, mahua seeds, flowers are nationalized in a number of States. The States have created Forest Development Corporations to remove middlemen, to take the task of procurement and sale of the produce. But, the Commission observed that none of the States are engaging themselves in collection, in the real sense of the term. The Forest Development Corporations only fixes the collection rates and asks the purchaser agents to pay that rate to the collectors. There is rampant exploitation by the middlemen by paying low rates, delayed payments, rejection of collection, cheating, intimidation. The women remain totally at the mercy of the middlemen. The Forest officials are hardly in support of the collectors. The Commission, therefore, recommends that

- (1) The forest produce collectors should be paid the rates in such a way that they do earn at least not less than the NREP rate, at the end of the day.
- (2) Serious efforts should be made by the Forest authorities to help these women form their own cooperatives to collect and sell the produce to the Forest Development Corporations.
- (3) The women of the cooperative should be trained in processing of the various minor forest produce.
- (4) A scheme should be developed to supply additional foodgrains in the months of unemployment during the year.

### Garment Workers

3.79. The readymade garment industry is a highly profitable one for the manufacturer and trader or contractor, given that demand is high and labour available is docile and cheap. The trader buys fents, rags and substandard materials from mills and whole-sellers, this is cut by cutters, who may work on the traders' premises; then distributed to tailors, mostly women do the stitching generally in their own homes. Where production is modernized and fashions set up with the latest technology, men workers have a monopoly. Moreover, it is difficult to find a single women cutter.

3.80. Tailor women collect the cloth from the traders, stitch the material and then return the finished garments and collect the next batch of material. This a regular process. It is the women who have to bear the entire cost of space, transportation, maintenance of their sewing machines, and thread. Wages may be paid weekly or monthly and flimsy, temporary records are kept. Piece-rate wages are arbitrarily fixed. Since these workers are scattered and unorganised, they are paid very little, with no fear of protest. In fact, considering that they work at home and establishment cost is borne by them, their wages should be higher and not lower than the wages of those who work in large garment factories. As such the existing labour laws do not apply to them as they are not workers and even if applied, the laws are violated. **The workers have no protection, no rights, no recognition and no powers.**

3.81. In the light of this situation, the National Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. In areas where this industry is concentrated Training Centres should be set up in order to help women upgrade their skills, as well as to give them information about their rights and the schemes **that they can benefit from in order to go into business on their own or as a group, such as a co-operative.**

2. In order to reach the maximum number of women and help them in the most meaningful way, **a large number of extension workers** is necessary, who should be trained to impart the information that is relevant to these workers, to help them avail of schemes and services, and to press for legal redress.

3. These workers are especially **vulnerable to health problems related to eyesight, poor ventilation, and postural problems**. These need to be taken into account while planning any ameliorative measures for them.

## Vendors/Hawkers

3.82. Vendors and hawkers perform a vital function in the commodity distribution system of towns and cities, yet they are regarded as anti-developmental and anti-social. City planners are biased in favour of the formal sector, and prefer to provide for expensive super-markets and shops rather than help vendors who only require a small space for squatting with their wares, and transportation facilities from the wholesale market to their vending sites.

3.83. It appears that the unorganised sector is expanding and urban poverty is to stay for many years to come. Vendors, with their small capital needs therefore, should be encouraged and supported, and informal and formal sectors allowed to complement each other. While it is a fact that there are associated problems of congestion and hygiene, the solution cannot be to ban them, dislocate them or fine and harass them, especially because most hawkers belong to the low income population, and 40 per cent of them are women, of whom 30 to 40 per cent are estimated by some micro studies to be the sole supporters of their families. Thus measures to help hawkers should be part of the broader structural policies designed to improve the standards of living and welfare of the low income population in the city.

3.84. Therefore, the National Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. The service performed by vendors should be recognized and the authorities should liberally issue licences to women vendors especially, considering their greater need and major contribution. The licence should carry a photograph of the vendor and therefore serve as an identity card as well.

2. There is a need for an integrated authority to be set up whose primary responsibilities would be to co-ordinate and increase the effectiveness of commodity distribution systems in towns and cities. This body should have provision for adequate consultation between the representatives of the distribution trade and the officials so that policy can be developed and all decisions are based on a two-way dialogue. Thus even when measures like relocation are unavoidable, the process will be saved from the usual arrogance and insensitivity to the vendors' economic needs.

3. Urban planners should recognise the space requirements of vendors and hawkers. A space for a women's market, such as the traditional women's market in Manipur, should be integral part of the plans for all newly developing areas.

4. Every market complex must have provision for squatting vendors and all related facilities like drinking water, washing, toilet, storage and creche be provided. Market Committees should be formed to manage these facilities on which women vendors should be given due representation; furthermore, the vendors should organise to form **their own Association**. Where street foods are sold, supply of water taps and garbage disposal **should** be taken care of by this Association.

5. A mechanism should be evolved for creating a fund which would assist vendors in their cash requirements for expanding their business to viable proportions. With comparatively less investment there are some gains and consequent improvements in the **lives** of the

**workers.** The fine collected should be utilised for their welfare. Supportive services and social security schemes may be planned and set up.

6. Regular training courses should be organised for vendors at the market-place itself, on sanitation and health, fair business practice and schemes of assistance and how to avail of them.

7. All existing legislation and municipal rules should be amended according to the above points and new legislation enacted wherever necessary.

## **Domestic Workers**

3.85. Domestic workers are in the lowest rung of the ladder in the urban economy. The sexual division of labour, and its pattern of task allocation, has rendered domestic service to become a predominantly female occupation. The tasks performed by domestic workers are practically the same ones performed as unpaid work within the family such as cleaning, washing, ironing, taking care of children. There are 1.06 million domestic workers according to the 1971 Census, out of whom more than 4 lakh are women. This is one of the most vulnerable groups of workers since there is neither government regulation to cover this section of the labour force, nor is there any written contract for the work, so they are hired and fired at the will of the employer. In the absence of any formal contract, their working condition is often oppressive and the employer can always evade his responsibility. The traditional trade unions have also not taken any interest in organizing them till recently. The problems faced by them include deplorable wages, insecure service, no holidays or leave, no maternity or medical benefits and health problems.

3.86. The Commission recommends the following steps to improve the condition of domestic workers:

1) **A system of registration for domestic workers should be introduced.** Besides giving them visibility and taking account of the workers and their contribution, this registration body could also perform a role of looking into the problems and grievances of these workers. It could also, from time to time, assess the local situation and fix wages/rates for the domestic workers. This body may be composed of the representatives of the State, the domestic workers and employers as a tripartite body.

2) **Fixing a minimum wage is extremely important in view of the prevalent exploitative trends.** Wage fixation would need to take into account the hours of work, the spread over of work, the number of jobs to be performed, and the number of persons in the family, since that would determine the workload of the domestic workers. The rate fixed, however, should in no case, be less than the prescribed minimum wage.

3) Legislation: **There is a need for a legislation to regulate the conditions of employment, social security and security of employment.** This lack of security in the job restricts the domestic workers bargaining power and demand for basic facilities like paid leave. A number of women's groups working with domestic workers have proposed "The Domestic Workers (conditions of service) Bill" to regulate working hours, holidays and leave, letter of appointment, application of certain existing laws like the minimum wages to domestic workers which the Commission endorses.

4) For the enforcement of the policy and legislation mentioned, it is essential that this vulnerable group domestic workers be organized which can put them in a better position. They may be organized for economic benefits support services like education and child care, training, better tools and equipments.

5) There is also need for all these organizing efforts to culminate into a stronger movement. For this, there should be a federation of domestic works where all the small

groups working with domestic works come together and build collective strength. Government can also take a very positive and supportive role in this by organizing workshops of these groups and providing them support and knowhow.

6) The problems of domestic workers are, linked to the problems of lack of alternatives and distress immigration from rural areas. Hence the depending of these migrant women on their employers (including shelter) is very high which makes them weak when it comes to bargaining for their rights. In such a situation, **the provision of low cost hostels for such girls/women would help reduce their dependence and vulnerability.**

7) **There have been successful attempts of agencies in training girls to be domestic help who also look after their employment, settle their wages. Girls collect once a week at the agencies where they are provided training, literacy and entertainment. These agencies promote shelter and find alternate placement for girls thrown out by the employer. The Government should help and promote such agencies by assisting them financially.**

### Anti-poverty Programmes

3.87. Anti-poverty programmes were designed to directly benefit those below the poverty line as development benefits were not accruing to the poor. The experiences with antipoverty programmes have shown that there is a need to improve the policy, programme design and implementation in this area.

3.88. At the policy level, there is a need **to accept that women's needs are not only for self-employment.** In fact, poor women can be divided into three categories on the basis of their needs,

1. Destitutes, disabled and handicapped women who want social assistance rather than income/employment generating programmes;
- (2) Women (mainly belonging to the poorer sections) who are neither willing nor capable of taking up self-employment programmes and who want wage employment;
- (3) Women who have skill/education/literacy/enterprise to take up self-employment programmes;

**The programmes should be designed on the basis of the needs of women at the micro level.**

3.89. The Commission recommends that the self-employment programmes should be strengthened on the following lines:

- (1) Planning for self employment for women needs a multi-pronged strategy. Apart from the measures to support self-employment as such, the planning should also **incorporate measures like child care and child development, technology to reduce drudgery of women, organisation of women and overall development of women.**
- (2) In order to improve the access of women to self employment, it is necessary to be judicious by combining the household approach in planning with individual approach. **Women should be treated as independent entities** in the labour market and attempts should be made to provide equal access to self-employment to both men and women.
- (3) It is also necessary to give **joint titles to women** to improve their access to the credit market. The present approach of giving them joint ownership of land only in the event of transfer of **land** is not enough. The joint ownership should be extended to all the types of **productive** assets and to the present status of ownership also.
- (4) **Appropriate extension strategy** should be adopted to attack the specific

socio-psychological constraint of women and to reach them ultimately. If necessary, female extension officers/staff should be appointed.

- (5) The designing of self-employment programmes (specially of DWCRA) for women should have an explicit planning component in the sense that each aspect of planning—training, marketing, management, should get enough attention. Group approach will be useful in this context.
- (6) **Special attention will have to be paid to the needs of female-headed families.** This could be done by giving them preferential treatment in self or wage employment programmes. Destitutes of these families should also be provided social assistance on a preferential basis through social security measures.
- (7) It is necessary to pay adequate **attention to the support programmes like maternity benefits, creche, and technology for removing drudgery of women.** It is important that these programmes are undertaken at a level that creates an impact and meet the needs of women. In this context, it is important to mention the urgency of the programmes pertaining to drinking water, energy and environment, as all the three are likely to reduce women's drudgery considerably.
- (8) Organisation of women for creating awareness, for production activities as well as for creating solidarity among women, will contribute considerably to eradication of women's poverty. **Reformulation of the Mahila Mandal Scheme, and encouragement to women's cooperatives,** will be useful in this context.
- (9) **DWCRA could be improved by detailing of guidelines for the programmes; strengthening the training component of skill, entrepreneurship and management; supporting it in the areas of raw materials and marketing; and introducing continuous sympathetic evaluation of the programme.**
- (10) **Agencies like Mahila Mandals, voluntary agencies and cooperatives should be utilised for assisting women in completing formalities for getting credit.**

3.90. In the areas of **wage employment programmes**, the following steps are recommended:

- (1) It is **necessary to increase the size** of this programme considerably. EGS of Maharashtra has shown that poor women do participate in these programmes in large numbers,
- (2) There is a need to strengthen the planning component of these programmes so as to ensure continuous work to women workers on productive assets which are **selected carefully keeping in mind the needs of the region.**
- (3) Planning and designing of these programmes should be done keeping in mind the specific needs and preferences of poor women,
- (4) Arrangement such as **drinking water and creches, and worksheds should be provided on work sites,**
- (5) **Regular payment of wages** at the stipulated rates should be insisted upon. Better supervision by authorities can contribute substantially in this area.

3.91. The Commission is of the view that in order to diversify women's activities; it is necessary to impart them training to improve their skills. In the existing farmers training programmes, participation of women is very low. In TRYSEM, although the participation of women is reported to have achieved a target of 30 per cent, training has not been imparted in the areas in which women work, or in the allied areas. The emphasis of training has been knitting, sewing, embroidery and possibly animal husbandry. This has not led to increase in the employment of women or enhanced their remuneration. **All training programmes must be linked to employment with the objective of increasing the remuneration and improving**



**their living conditions.** The objective should also be to prevent the growth of unskilled workers and channelise them to take up skilled activities.

3.92. There is a **need to train the government functionaries at the District and Block levels on the needs of women, especially the incidence of women headed households** and those where women's income constitute the major household expenditure. The Commission observed on its tours, that most government functionaries are quite unaware of the substantial proportion of such women among the women workers, because of a mistaken belief, based on middle class, cultural norms, that all women were attached to households and cared for by some male member. **There is also a need to train them on the type of projects the women can initiate** and that a collateral for taking a loan is not required when the project is less than Rs. 5,000/-.

3.93. It is also true that for those below poverty line, poverty means half starvation. Among the hungry, women are hungrier. It has been very often observed that the credit facility given to them is consumed in buying foodgrains, for the family. The half starved and malnourished women can hardly be expected to have the psychological strength and mental will to participate in the development schemes meant for them.

3.94. Therefore, the Commission recommends that ways should be explored whereby additional foodgrains can be provided as subsidy for those who have a loan burden to discharge under the IRDP, and use on their way to relative progress. In such case, there would be more likelihood of the credit being used entirely for productive purpose.

3.95. The Commission also recommends that the foodgrains supplied at subsidised rate to the private sector should be stopped and diverted to the rural poor.

3.96. The Commission recommends that a programme should be built up linking wage employment, development activities and the public distribution system, for women especially the vulnerable groups like tribals, forest workers, IRDP loan beneficiaries. A wage programme through public distribution system can be designed for poor women. Supply of foodgrains serves as an insulation against price rise in the open market outside, particularly during the lean period of the year.

For women, food means better productivity and better motherhood.

#### Drought Relief Work

3.97. Unfortunately, drought has become a regular feature in our country causing severe distress to poor women workers who are pushed further into the areas of under employment and unemployment. Famine work should not be seen as a charity to the poor but as a basic human right for those who need work. The Commission, therefore, recommends:

(1). As per the Minimum wages Act and judgement of the Supreme Court and the guidelines laid down by various High Courts, **all relief works must pay minimum wages. Any notification of any State Government to exclude famine relief work from the jurisdiction of Minimum Wages Act should be treated as illegal and unconstitutional.**

(2) Effective maintenance of muster rolls and wage slip should be ensured. Where women are working, their own name should be extended in the muster roll and not their men's name, **the cash payment also should go actually in the women's hands.**

As it is observed that more than 50 per cent labour is female labour on Relief worksites, the rule of law to provide creches, shed and drinking water should be strictly observed. The creche can be managed by the combined efforts of the local village Mahila Mandal and the women on the worksite.

(3) **Famine relief work should include a variety of activities which help build future capital assets, and human capital in and around the villages where people live.** The

assets created should be those having priority for women like work-sheds, creches and toilets. there should be decentralization in formulation of projects and diversification in the nature of activities which may include activities like improving the quality of land, water resources, digging or deepening of wells, bunding. For this local level planning will have to be ensured. National or State level blue prints cannot be implemented at local levels. In this context, involvement of local women and men, women's representatives, Mahila Mandals, Voluntary Organizations, Unions must be considered.

Famine relief work should not be seen merely as a responsibility of one department or of one unit, but as a combined effort all the concerned Departments of the Central and State Governments.

## Urbanization and the Informal Sector

3.98. Cities have developed in India as commercial or trade centres, or as administrative headquarters. They have been dominated by an urban elite class for whom they are designed and developed. Many of these elite belong to the formal sector. On the other hand, the conditions of poverty in rural India has led to the migration of poor to urban centres for employment. However, they have no access to space and land use either for shelter or for pursuing their occupation, neither do they have access to the formal sector for employment. As a result, the dominance of the elite and the formal sector has marginalised a whole group of people in the city. These disadvantaged people solve their problem by hawking on the streets, squatting in public places, by making "unauthorised colonies" and "unplanned" settlements.

3.99. **There is a strong case in our reconsidering the priorities and recognising the needs of the informal sector who contribute substantially to the income and services to the formal sector.** Understanding of space itself, leads to many planning problems. Concepts of land values, returns from the land, and economic viability of functions of land lead to a situation where the formal sector dominates the land use planning process. In order to provide equal access and right to use of urban space for all citizens, special measures have to be taken in favour of the informal sector. The following points may provide a direction as to how to incorporate urban informal sector in urban planning.

1. Recognize the urban informal sector as an integral part of urban planning. **All the Master Plans or Development Plans must have a special component in the plans and policies formulated to include the urban informal sector in planning.**

2. **Make land use plan in such a way that it achieves maximum integration and complementarity of informal and formal sector.** New and liberal location policies must be adopted. To give an example, **while allocating a plot of land for a shopping complex, enough space should be provided to accommodate and encourage the vendors and the retailers.**

3. **Change or modification of the existing land-use and land tenure policies so that variation in the use of urban space during the different days of the week and during the day and the night becomes possible.** The central business districts of the towns, when closed on Sunday, can be used for weekly markets. Huge parking lots in the middle of the city can be put to productive use during the nights.

4. **Recognize and support the services of the urban informal sector, such that their conflict with the formal sector can be resolved.** Dumping yards for the waste-picker, segregated traffic lanes for pedal rickshaws, working yards for the home based producers are some examples.

5. **Work places for women producers and workers, doing their own account work, with facilities for lighting and ventilation, drinking water, toilets and creches need to be**

provided. In shopping and office complexes, factories and institutions like schools, hospitals, universities, creches should be provided. In addition, space for small depots need to be provided near places of work such as commercial centers, and strategic points of communication, where milk, vegetables, fruits and provisions are available to reduce the work-load of women whose responsibility it normally is to make such purchases after working hours.

6. Housing facilities for working women, especially for single women or women headed households, need to be planned. **Similarly, the housing facilities for homebased workers should include adequate space provision for carrying out their work.**

7. It is recommended that wherever possible **separate transport facilities** for women may be provided to women worker to and from their place of work so that they do not face any harassment at the hand of male passengers. Provision for transport of their goods should be made in such vehicles.

8. **Encourage studies in the field of education and research of urban planning, that help evolve planning processes and techniques which can ensure that the urban informal sector is not by-passed in planning.** Special attention in the studies should given to women workers in the informal sector. Studies on the space requirements, housing and movement characteristics, even planning and layout and of hawking grounds, can be carried out in relation to the poor, specially women.

## Technology

3.99.1 **Technology has treated women workers unfairly.** A number of studies have documented that improvements in technology, in an industry, has displaced women. There are, therefore, some short-run measures which are recommended to protect women from this displacement:

- (1) Directives should be issued to all industrial units, specially in the public sector, that **no further reduction in the level of employment of women will be permitted;**
- (2) **A small planning group should be set up by the Technology Policy Cell to design a format, listing the criteria for evaluation of all proposals of technology transfer and automotion in industries** so that a view can be taken with reference to women's opportunities for employment.
- (3) Schemes should be formulated **for retraining women released from sick industries or closed industrial units.**

3.99.2. There is also a **need to develop a long term perspective in technology for women.**

This could be done on the following lines:

- (1) The Ministry of Labour should prepare a list of those sectors/industries which are presently labour-intensive and provide employment to sizeable number of women who are likely to be affected by technology transfer jeopardising their employment opportunities. In such cases, **the pace and degree of mechanisation should be so regulated and phased out that women are trained on the job and be given inputs like credit and tools**
- (2) **Projects which result in the displacement of women should not be issued business licenses and/or funded or given concessions of subsidies by the Government, Banks, and Corporations, unless the displaced women can be firmly rehabilitated in alternative employment. The displaced women should have the first priority in training for new jobs created by the new technology.**
- (3) The Project Appraisal Division of the Planning Commission in collaboration with the Technology Policy Implementation Committee, should **formulate clear guidelines**

**for the approval of import of technology or automation in any given industry, by listing out issues critical in technology assessment and valuation.**

- (4) The Inter-Departmental Working Group set up by the Technology Policy Implementation Committee, to draw up guidelines for technology assessment and evaluation, and absorption of imported technology, has made a large number of recommendations (1985) which need to be implemented.
- (5) It should be incumbent on the employers to prepare a good feasibility report submitting their proposal for a loan to the government for the purpose of technology transfer to indicate existing capital-labour ratio and changes expected after introduction of technology, present pattern of employment (sexwise) within the industry at the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled levels, and the demand for different categories of labour after technology transfer.
- (6) All technologies which are likely to directly and indirectly increase women's workloads must be accompanied by other technologies or measures to ease or eliminate these side effects. In other words, a systems approach should be used to develop packages, rather than the current uni-dimensional approach. These **multi-faceted packages must be gender-sensitive** and women biased.
- (7) The development of **new technologies for traditional or even modern occupations, must be prioritised, beginning with women's occupations.** In other words, technology development must be selective, designed to impact positively on women's work, whether wage-work or non-wage work.
- (8) **Development of simple or appropriate technology in the form of tools, implements, and protective devices, to remove or reduce the work-related hazards faced by women, must be given top priority and taken up on a war-footing.** Mechanisms must be created for involving the women themselves in research and development process, so that the results are appropriate and useful to women.
- (9) An advisory committee, with some power of veto, must be set up at Central Government level **to monitor the impact of technology on women.** The Committee should also actively identify and promote the areas for research and development of pro-women technologies.
- (10) Existing technologies, which are not appropriate to women, though they are almost exclusively utilised by women (e.g. sewing machines, handcart pulling, table heights, cashew-nut sifters should be redesigned on a priority basis. The redesigning should be based on anthropometric measurements of Indian women.
- (11) **Thirty-five per cent of all the research and development funds of national research and design institutes should be reserved for women's work, including occupational health studies,** and working out changes in these for the convenience of women workers.
- (12) An important requirement in this context is to introduce an **in-built system of evaluation.** The government agencies processing such proposals usually do not have adequate data on non-technical issues to give adequate weightage to them. Instead of doing a post-mortem analysis of the impact of production technologies on employment of women, there should be an inbuilt system of such evaluation. A multi-disciplinary group for technology evaluation may be set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour drawing expertise of several organisations within the government (including Planning Commission, economic ministries, financial institu-

tions entrusted with the responsibility for analysing technology choices, Women's Cell of the Department of Science and Technology, representative of TPIC, training institutions and research and development systems) and from non-governmental organisations. Pooling together data and information, the report prepared by the Group should be given due weightage while considering proposals of technology transfer and should be disseminated widely.

## Health

**4.1. Most of the health problems that women face, are related to their general life situation. These aggravate the problems women face in their work situation as workers.**

These problems include nutrition, accessibility to health services, water, housing, sanitation, maternity benefits, and child-care, control over their own bodies, opportunities for education and training, their status within the family, as well as situations that affect their mental and emotional health, that is, economic and job insecurity and helplessness due to harrasment and discrimination. It is necessary to tackle these together with the health problems women face directly related to their work.

**4.2. Health is no longer seen as a service without an integrated approach. A package of health services for women in the informal sector, will not be adequate without, at the same time, affecting their levels of living, including a living wage, improved conditions, of work, a safe and hazard-free work-place as well as protective equipment, controlled hours, benefits such as for health, maternity, creches and old-age pensions, housing and potable water near to their home in quantities necessary for family health. Health must be understood in the context of this total scenario to affect the conditions of women in the informal sector.**

**4.3.** The National Commission makes the following suggestions with regard to women, health and work.

1. Nutritious and sufficient food is a crying need of the women workers in the informal sector. Specific nutritional programmes which include calcium, proteins, iron and Vitamin D, could be initiated through the government health care system. A nation-wide programme for the distribution of nutritious, subsidised food supplements which includes calcium for women should be organised, on the lines of a similar programme of milk and egg powder in the 1950's. **Coarse grains like ragi as well as milk must be made widely available at subsidised rates.**

2. Mental health is an important element in the general well-being of women workers in the informal sector. **Physical insecurity and the anxiety due to it, often lead to physical ill-health.** Besides, a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability paralyses women workers still further. Hence, it is necessary that:

a. There should be stringent punishments for rape, sexual harrasment, eve-teasing and other actions threatening women. **The Government should legislate a Prevention of Violence Against Women Act to cover harrasment at work-sites, homes, streets, police stations, and prinsons.**

**War-site harrasment also be included in labour laws and be included in the Industrial Disputes Act, where the burden of proof be on the man.**

b. There is also the **need for a Prevention of Domestic Violence Act to cover specifically wife-beating, child-battering, molestation, marital and domestic rape and mental cruelty.**

c. **The Law of Evidence must be changed, in view of the fact** that many of the most serious crimes against women, are committed in situation without witnesses e.g. rape, dowry

harrassment, marital violence and sexual assault.

d. There is a need for facilities for psychotherapy and the rehabilitation of victims of harassment, rapes & exploitation. Sending them to a shelter is not adequate to overcome their shock, anger and shame. They need a trained staff, who understand their needs and the reactions, and facilities for medical care and psychotherapy.

3. Availability of and accessibility to health care facilities.

a. Increasing the availability of the accessibility to health care facilities, are important in order that the recent positive advances against diseases reach the mass of poor women. Statistics on health facilities and their use indicate that women go to hospital and contact medical functionaries less often than men. Studies also indicate that, the amount of money spent by households for medical treatment is greater for men and boys than for women and girls. The result is higher morbidity and mortality among women, including a very high maternal mortality rate. The rates of maternal death, lack of accessibility for the care of pregnant mothers, deliveries conducted by trained attendants, coverage of women with immunisation against tetanus, are all well known, and do not need to be reported. The need for trained dais, accessible primary health centres and sub-centres, and their linkages to referral and district hospitals is also known and has bearing on the health needs of the general population as much as women working, (b) it is also important to state because a large proportion of the users of the service mentioned at (a) are women in poverty, all of whom are workers. **There should be Refresher/Orientation courses for the doctors on subject of women's work and health.** It is necessary that **the medical education should recognise occupational health hazards especially in the informal sector.** These should be a part of the regular courses in the curriculum. It was especially evident that the Preventive and social Medicine Departments had not even considered the possible problems of health of this sector. In spite of letters to all the PSM Departments, hardly any response was received.

A few visits to PSM Departments by the Task Force and by the national commission also brought to the fore this neglected area which required to be studied by both medical personnel, social scientists and professional social workers.

b. While ensuring better choices for women, including women's access to safe deliveries and safe and free abortion, it is necessary to stress the immediate abolition of the oppression that comes directly from the Government pressure on women both as promoters (ANMS, teachers, nurses) and as receptors of family planning methods like injectable contraceptive and amniocentesis. In fact, **the entire emphasis of 'Family Planning', to the detriment of access to other health care facilities, needs to be strongly opposed, not only because it is oppressive, in itself, and has caused misery to millions of poor women in the country, but also because it discredits the public health system and makes poor women workers dependent upon private, exploitative medical facilities, even when then desperately need these for abortions, deliveries and serious illnesses.** Since all poor women work, they are gravely affected.

4. Certain concrete steps need to be immediately taken to facilitate the reaching of health-care to the poor, labouring women.

a. **The timings of the dispensaries and hospitals should be fixed in a way which would be convenient to working women** who cannot forego their income for medical care.

b. Necessary **medicines should be adequately stocked** and the hospitals and PHCs should be operated in such a way as to keep the number of visits of the women to the minimum necessary, if they are to avail of the treatment, otherwise, they get discouraged and do not continue, because of the competing demands on their time as they carry multiple responsibilities.

c. There should be a **24 hours creche facility for women patients with children in every hospital and PHC.**

d. Women should be allowed **two free bus-rides to the nearest PHC every month.**

e. Because they are already poorly nourished, illness complicates this condition further. **As food is a significant component for effective recovery,, hospital should provide free food** to poor women most of whom are daily wage, casual and piece rate earners whose income ceases on hospitalisation.

f. **Dais who are the only source of help for the majority of women, should be taken seriously, as a vital source of rural health care.** Their skills should be enhanced via on-going training and their regular involvement in public health work should be encouraged.

g. **The Commission recommends that the community may be motivated to construct and maintain one clean and sterilized room in the village** to be used for conducting deliveries by trained dais.

h. Women should be involved at the village level as community Health Guides if women's access to health care is to be improved. Teams comprising of one literate and one experienced older women, though not necessarily literate, may be the most desirable, both in term of outreach and accessibility to women. Their training should include both preventive health education and curative care **Mahila Mandals should support these women health workers and assist in the maintenance of linkages between the official health care system and village women.**

#### Occupation Related Recommendation

4.4 In the formal sector, workers are entitled to a break after four hours of work as well as leave provisions and two paid weekly off. These are provisions the workers have won after decades of struggle, because it is physically absolutely necessary, if one's health is not to be break down completely. These provisions need to be extended to the workers in the informal sector too.

4.5. Regulation of working hours is particularly necessary in the informal service and production centres, where there is considerable exploitation of the poor with long hours and no over-time. **Piece-rates should be converted into daily wages, based on the normal quantum of work completed at a healthy pace.** Only then, will women not have to work long hours to make a meagre living.

4.6. **Health Insurance, including compensation for accidents, should be available to women workers.** Health cards should be distributed to them, as is supposed to be done in the beedi-industry, but is not effectively implemented. Through this, they would be entitled to receive health care of their choice at any public health facility (Primary Health Centre, sub-centre, ESIS Hospitals, Municipal dispensaries, T.B. hospitals, general Government hospitals, etc.) and/or recognised private facility up to a certain stipulated limit. The latter is necessary because workers are often located far from any Government facility, have no transport, or money for any transport that is available, and often find the timings of the Government facilities, unsuitable. In addition, in medical emergencies (complications during child-birth, accidents, etc.), the nearest facility may be a private one.

Accident insurance for both temporary and permanent disabilities, monetary and health benefits, should be available through both public health and private facilities as mentioned above.

4.7. Provision of a safe work-place and safety equipment (including personal protective equipment) is necessary for women. Ideally, it should be insisted that **every workplace should assure safety to the workers.** This may imply mechanisation of processes which are



hazardous. This, in turn, means loss of jobs/work for the women, which cannot be permitted until there is alternate safe work for women, and new training facilities for them. This is an important element in improving the health of women. Till then however, it is necessary to **provide safety equipment including powerful exhausts to remove harmful dust from the work environment and personal protective equipment like masks, feet protectors, eye glasses, ear muffs and gloves and strong contraptions for the safety of women workers.**

**4.8. Preventive health education** both with respect to occupational and other health problems (anaemia, leucorrhea etc.), **should be initiated through the Workers' Education Board.**

**4.9.** Electricity should be made available on a priority basis to workers, particularly those whose trade adversely affects their eye-sight (this includes chikan and ready-made garment workers, zari workers, weavers and others). **Electricity should be supplied to home based women workers at non-industrial/non-commercial rates.**

**4.10. A comprehensive Health and Safety Act should be evolved and enacted.** This Act should give the workers:

1. right to information about chemicals and work processes at the work-site.
2. right to inspect work-sites.
3. right to demand guard for machinery, monitoring and controlling levels of dust, fumes and fibres in the work atmosphere.
4. right to demand personal protective equipment.
5. right to stop work if the conditions are found unsafe.
6. right to redress compensation etc. for damages.

This Act should be evolved in consultation with workers, trade unions and concerned voluntary agencies.

7. Maternity benefits, creches, old age benefits and pensions are mentioned elsewhere in the recommendations.
8. There is a need for a humane Drug Policy and check on the Pharmaceutical industry that at present operates on the profit principle like any other industry, even up to hoarding life-saving drugs to like prices. The National Commission recommends the promotion of low cost medicines on the lines of the policy on minimum essential drugs of Bangladesh.

**4.11. Subsidized tools of trade** which reduce occupational health problems should be made available to women workers.

### Priorities in research

**4.12. Indian Council of Medical Research, National Institute of Occupational Health, National Institute of Design, as such other organisations, should undertake occupational health studies of women's work.** These should be done with a view to developing simple preventive and protective mechanisms and machines acceptable to workers which would reduce health problems.

**4.13.** Special emphasis must be placed on the ergonomic aspect of women's work, including postural problems. Innovation in the production processes which could reduce health problems should be examined, with workers guiding and advising throughout, and such innovations be recognised and rewarded. To provide legislative protection and removal of restrictive legislation, need to be provided for voluntary agencies to play an effective role.

**4.14.** With respect to technology, the commission recommends as follows:-

1. The development of new technologies for traditional, or even modern occupations, must be prioritised, beginning with women's occupations. In other words **technolo-**



**gy development must be selective, designed to impact positively on women's work, whether wage work or non-wage work.**

2. Development of simple or appropriate technology in the form of tools, implements, and protective devices, to remove or reduce the work-related hazards faced by women, must be given top priority and taken up on a war-footing. **Mechanisms must be created for involving the women themselves in the research and development process**, so that the results are appropriate and useful to women.
3. In the specific **area of health technology—particularly contraceptives and sex-determination techniques—strong and immediate steps must be taken to withdraw or ban such technologies where they are actually damaging the health of already vulnerable poor women.** Measures for women's education and health promotion must be strengthened.
4. Multi-centered studies of health problems of women workers in specific occupational groups should be undertaken by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on a priority basis. These studies should cover:
  - i. the occupation related problems—direct and indirect.
  - ii. the general health problems of women workers.
  - iii. special stress should be on the effects of the triple burden on women.
5. National Institutes like the ICMR, ICSSR and other bodies **should give a priority to research on health problems of the unorganised labouring women.** It is a pity that a leading institute like the ICMR does not even have a women's cell to look into the health problems of half the country's population. However, the present tendency of thrusing research related to women to a small cell is also questionable. That has implied in practice that the small cell conduct studies specifically on women, while the major portion of the personnel, research projects and finances of the institutes focus on men. In fact, what should happen is that while the entire institute, say, the ICMR or the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) should focus on workers, both, women and men, the women's cell should try to take up issues related more specifically to women.
6. The ICMR, NIOH, National Institute of Design (NID) and such other organisations should undertake occupational health studies of women's work. These should be done **with a view to developing simple preventive and protective mechanisms and machines acceptable to workers, which would reduce their health problems.**

## Education

5.1. Education is both an important instrument for increasing and bettering the chances of women's employability and for empowering women as they learn to think for themselves, become confident and also develop the capability of recognising more acutely the areas of exploitation. This fact has also been recognised and accepted in the National Policy on Education, 1986, by the Government, wherein, it has been mentioned that:

Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women, it will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbook, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active anvolvement of education institutions.

5.2. However, although in principle the fact of empowering women through education

has been recognised in the National Policy on Education and the Programme of Action, the Commission suggest the following steps be taken by which the working women themselves and their children, specially the girl child, may benefit.

1. Since one of the reasons for poor enrolment of a girl child and even poorer retention of their enrolment is their contribution in helping the working mothers in domestic work and looking after younger children, and also contributing to the family economy as child labour, it is necessary that **there should be shifts for girls at suitable times** so that they can assist their mothers in work and go to school. It should be possible for all the school going children in a family to attend the same shift, or else, the girl will be required to remain home to mind the younger children.

2. To encourage parents to send their girls to afternoon shifts, it should be desirable that **a women helper is provided on an honorarium basis for accompanying the children from the house and back to ensure their enrolment and safety.**

3. The same helper as mentioned at (b) above or another **helper's services could be utilised for looking after the siblings below school age of the girls going to the school in the premises of the school itself.** It may be a room, a verandah or a temporary shed constructed for the purpose.

4. It would be preferable to have **a regular creche attached to the primary school where the younger children could be taken care of so that the older child can attend the school.**

5. **Incentives for sending the girls to school** will have to be given to promote their education. In many states like Haryana, cash per month and free uniform is given to scheduled caste girls. Similar facilities including midday meals, free textbooks and exercise book, could be extended to all girls students at least up to the primary school level. If the girls are attracted to education, they are likely to move away eventually from the back breaking traditional occupation of their mothers to better employment.

6. The syllabi need to be made more relevant for the children of rural areas. Practical subjects like animal husbandry, cattle care, soil conservation, agriculture, social forestry may be added and such options offered along with subjects like history, geography, modern science and physics.

7. Under the Government Scheme of Condensed Courses being implemented by the Central Social Welfare Board, the adolescent girls and above, who acquire education in a non-formal manner, have to appear in the same examination for which children from public schools from metropolitan cities also appear. This needs to be changed. In certain situations, a good grounding in languages, mathematics, general knowledge and some subjects relevant to their life situation, should suffice to get them a school certificate for the purpose of getting jobs at certain levels.

8. It has been mentioned in the Programme of Action, issued by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, that women teachers should be preferably recruited at the school level to give greater confidence to the parents to send their girl children to the school. The Commission would like to add that it is possible to have more women teachers only if they are posted in their home villages, or nearby villages, to which they belong or into which they marry. Certain States have a policy not to post anyone within 20 km of their home town. Such a policy should be totally discouraged. Women employees, like teachers or extension workers, need the security of the home and they cannot stay away from their families because of the basic responsibility of looking after the children. And if married, the husband and wife should be posted in the same area or as close geographically possible.

9. The Commission recognises the fact that in the rural areas there are not enough

trained women who can be appointed as teachers. Urban based teachers posted in rural areas do not tend to stay in the village to which they are posted, resulting in loss of school hours for the children. The Commission, therefore, recommends an innovation in the basic requirements of school teachers. **For primary schools, girls who have completed secondary school or have achieved even middle school level, may be given an intensive training for a period of one year or nine months in certain training colleges of the State Government. Their training, boarding and lodging should be free. After the training, they should be posted in their home villages, or in the vicinity of their villages.** Only in this manner, will it be possible for the schools to have women teachers who will stay there and not absent themselves from schools. We wish to reiterate again, that increasing women teachers would have a direct bearing on the recruitment of girls which would, eventually, improve their chances of employment or self-employment in the non-traditional sector.

10. The primers under the adult education programme do not have sufficient material related to women workers which will be of interest to the labouring workers. There are certain exceptions. For example, the Commission's studies reveal that the primers in Tamil Nadu were of a high quality in this respect.

11. The textbooks both in the formal and informal educational systems perpetuate labouring women's invisibility and stereotyped sex biased concept of women. The revision of the **textbooks and primers need to be carried out keeping the objective of bringing of women into greater focus.**

12. Greater emphasis has to be given on the vocational aspect of education. More experiments need to be undertaken to combine general and vocational education, specially for the rural areas. For a country as large as ours and to cater to the needs of the vast majority of labouring women in poverty, there cannot be a single model of education. **Various alternatives of education need to be developed.** These alternatives may be developed in a decentralised manner, preferably with an area specific approach.

13. The vocational training, which is being imparted at present is also stereotyped and sex biased. Trades which are more remunerative, and involving modern technology, are by and large beyond the reach of girls thereby restricting their options for employment. This needs serious attention.

14. **For the vocational training of girls, there should be a revolving fund from which they may be given scholarships to bear the cost of training and hostel facilities and they should reimburse the amount after they get suitable jobs.** This amount can be recycled again to help their equally deprived sisters. Experience of a private trust in this regard has been successful. After the girls get vocational training. They must be helped in job placement.

15. **It is necessary to convince the parents of poor girls regarding the relevance of education to the lives of their daughters.** This is possible if education and vocational training have a direct relation to their chances of employability and leading to enhancement in their remuneration. Further if the parents can be convinced that by providing education, the girls would also have the option of alternative methods of employment, they may send their daughters for education more readily. One of the important reasons for women's submitting to exploitation is that they do not have a viable economic alternative.

16. The Commission does realise that literacy in itself is not a solution to the basic problems of poor women, viz. exploitation and hunger; and therefore, literacy has to be understood in the wider context of the social structure. Therefore, the Commission recommends that any attempt to eradicate poverty should lead the women to deal with the question of equality, social justice and development. Therefore, it is crucial to have teaching

materials and teachers who deliver the service with these objectives. Ultimately the poor women should gain self-confidence to deal with her environment.

## Communication Network Systems

6.1 The channels of Communications do not generally portray the reality about labouring women in poverty. The fact that work for these women, who are at times the sole breadwinners, is a permanent necessity and not a transient phenomenon, is not brought out. Neither are the hard realities of their expectations, long hours of work, low and discriminatory wage and total lack of social support services is given much attention. If and when poverty is depicted specially in the cinema, it is shown as a stepping stone to a better and more glamorous lifestyle. The distortion of realities by the media has increased the gap of understanding between the different sections of society. Yet communication is one of the most important channels for the growth and development of women in the informal sector, as without information regarding services and benefits available through legislation, Government schemes, banks, and voluntary organisations women can hardly take advantage of them. The Commission therefore recommends the following:

1. **The Media must project the working woman in the unorganized sector as worker and not merely as performing the duties of wife/daughter. They being major earners they must be projected as producers and not merely consumers. Unless they are perceived as workers, their rights will not be recognized.**

2. It is necessary to formulate a national policy on communication clearly stating what it aims to do, how it plans to achieve its objectives, what is going to be the time period and institutional structures through which the objectives are to be realized.

3. All the groups which are concerned with the production of media, and/or connected with planning and dissemination, should structurally integrate the participation of socially aware persons. This will enable the planning group to perceive the gender perspective, and neither become blind to women's issues or err too much in the opposite direction of joining the band-wagon. **Media monitoring unit should try to help the media to orient themselves to the interest, concerns and development of women in the unorganized sector.**

4. **Frequent workshops of media persons may be organized to focus generally on problems of women, and specifically on problems of women in the unorganized sector.** Further, such workshops should also publicise the successful experiments carried out in the media, so as to help others in developing using such strategies. Such women workers should also be participants in the media workshops. This would further help in looking at the labouring women, not as mere objects to be acted upon, but as equal partners in creatively disseminating information.

5. **Innovative efforts to communicate should be encouraged.** If possible, some percentage of the financial allocation of the concerned Ministries may be reserved for such experiments so that more talents may emerge.

6. Considering the context of poverty and unemployment for large masses of the people and, therefore, a lack of access to electronic media its overuse should be discouraged. Instead, **other forms of interactions such as fairs, shibirs, health camps, jathas should be promoted.**

7. All the media channels, both in the public sector and the private sector, should take serious note of the seventh plan directive that themes which have pernicious consequences of conspicuous consumerism should not be projected. In this context, **advertisements displaying women as sex symbols and using them for sales promotion should be seriously dealt with.** It is not enough to control pornography through legislative enactment. It

is equally **necessary not to convey sex linked division of labour or women's predilection with feminine pursuit through conservation and traditional stereotypes.** More vigorous action of policy implementation is called for.

8. The public sector media should make deliberate attempts to not only project the problems of women in poverty, but should **monitor in such a way that conflicting role models are not depicted, nor derogatory references to their work are made.**

To improve content and coverage, coordinated efforts for increased interaction between NGOs, women's social action groups, research organizations, institutes of mass communication, and the media personnel should be developed. **The Information and Broadcasting Ministry should evolve such network to monitor the projection of women, and evolve a code of ethics with regard to the presentation of women in all types of media.**

### Print Media

6.2 It is recommended that more coverage to women's life and problems in poverty should be given. **Care must be taken to avoid sensationalism in the new coverage and more sensitive, sympathetic reporting should be done** with regard to this category of women.

6.3 There is **a need for a well-defined and adequately funded programme in regional languages in readable style,** to encourage the publication of data, schemes for women and also make them aware of their rights.

### Radio and Doordarshan

6.4 While deploring the fact that television is resorting to sponsored programmes, commercial cinema songs and interviews and viewing of largely mainstream films, which reinforce stereotyped images and role of women as housewife and which has hardly any relevance to most women, it is recommended that more vigilance be applied in selecting programmes. Many a times, seemingly 'women oriented' programmes are in reality dubious interpretations of the women's issues. They create a myth that is women oriented.

6.5 It is recommended that **taking cue from the grass-roots organizations, video be used as a consciousness raising tool by telecasting programmes which give information and guidelines in a visual manner.** Further, appreciating the power of songs sung in traditional tunes, but having feminist content which is very effective in mobilizing women, Doordarshan should collect such songs in collaboration with activist groups and prepare video cassettes to be played in the programmes of Ghar Bahar and Krishi Darshan.

6.6 **Women's programmes should not be treated as purdah hour, both on T.V. and the radio. Awareness with regard to problems of women in unorganized sector is necessary for both men and women. Therefore the timings for the broadcast of such programmes should be flexible.**

6.7 The findings of the Commission during its tours indicated that the **radio is more popular with women** and comparatively, they have more access to it. It is recommended that careful planning in the use of information dissemination be done. Further, it is very necessary to reschedule the timings of the programme. Only those women who are not working can listen to the radio in the afternoon. Most of the women workers prefer to have relevant programmes in the late evening.

6.8 **In view of the proposed expansion of television and radio, efforts must be made to include the component of poor women in planning. In order that these women get the benefit or reaching the media, more community sets be made available and more groups viewing be facilitated.**

6.9 Given the hierarchy of programmes in the present Doordarshan and radio structures, it is recommended that the depiction of the problems of a vast majority be given higher priority. Furthermore, facilities should be provided to make programmes which are not only studio bound but are also imaginative and meaningful to the context of women.

6.10 Producer normally has assessment of the target audience. Producers largely belonging to the middle and upper classes, have limited notions of the problems of the target audience. Hence, they need to be made aware of these women and their problems, so as to sensitively portray them in their work situation.

### Cinema

6.11 It is very frustrating to note that the commercial cinema does not project the self-employed women in a realistic manner. On the contrary, it gives a false idea about their life and never considers work as a necessity for women. Depiction of poverty is more used as a springboard to sentimentalize the role of the hero or the mother. Rape scenes are included for titillating the audience rather than depicting the vulnerability of these women. It is recommended that there be more strict control of production of such films. The dehumanizing portrayal must be condemned.

**6.12 Regional language films, have on quite a few occasions, depicted the problems of poor women sympathetically and with understanding. Such films must be dubbed in Hindi and other regional languages so that the message may reach a wider audience.**

6.13 Innovative film producers, and not very known experimentalists, must be given special encouragement, not merely for producing, but also helping in distribution.

### Department of Audio Visual Publicity (DAVP).

6.14 It is very sad to note the poor performance of DAVP. The posters, exhibitions, quickies in DAVP are not generally imaginative, and tend to be very directly didactic. They suggest that poor men and women are foolish and they have to be given advice from a pedestal. It is recommended that more sensitivity be exhibited in conveying the message whether it is of Family Planning, or of the use of mechanised equipment in agriculture, or of the age of marriage.

6.15 Field publicity devices have to be used judiciously in a society where the majority of the population is illiterate. Experience in legal literacy has shown that print materials can be used by para-legal workers or extension workers, but not for the dissemination of information to the rural masses.

6.16 The Development of Information dissemination System, in order to be effective, should take the following steps: A total training/orientation/re-training plan should be formulated for each development programme for women and, wherever possible, for a common cluster of development programmes for women, incorporating therein the hierarchy of functionaries, diverse groups of beneficiaries/participants, and training methodologies with the specific objective of developing knowledge, attitudes and practice of various development programmes for women. **A network among governmental and non-governmental organizations and educational institutions should be made part of the training plan with a view to making optimum use of the existing resources.** Combined training programmes at the block level can be developed comprising of local officials in the development programmes, representatives of non-governmental organizations, village level functionaries, and people's representatives at the village level who would be helpful in creating a climate for better utilization of the communication channels for development programmes. The training programmes should include, among other aspects, an element of desensitization of biases against the poor.

6.17 A well-coordinated communication strategy could be evolved by an integrated group comprising of Block level extension officials, bank officials, health officials and District Rural Development Agency officials for use of oral, visual and audio-visual methods of communication for development programmes.

6.18 Use of communication media in aid of a process of raising community participation, or for that matter, participation by self-employed women, in development programmes, could be viewed in terms wider than mere information dissemination exercises. **Most development programmes, which visualize the self-employed women as the potential beneficiary, or one of the intended target groups, would need to accord a broader orientation to communication support systems.** Communication support systems for the development programmes must reach the intended beneficiaries in terms of their own communication matrix and in a manner which provides a comprehensive effect, access to information, skills in using the information, and ability to articulate feedback which may ultimately make the policy formulation processes much more meaningful.

### **Education System, as instrument of communication**

6.19 In order to implement the spirit of the new Education Policy, the textbooks and curricula will need complete overhauling. The invisibility of the women of the unorganized sector, in the textbooks, is a sad commentary on our education system. **It is strongly recommended that textbooks be rewritten so as to eliminate invisibility of women and sexism in the portrayal of the life of women.**

6.20 Adult Education primers, which are meant to be utilized primarily by the women in poverty, need to be rewritten, as they do not in any way project the issues faced by these women nor make them self-confident or generate courage in them.

### **Government Functionaries**

6.21 The findings of the commission point out that dissemination of information from the Government to the people is highly unsatisfactory. Not only the top down approach is counter-productive, but many a times the functionaries are unaware of the work and problems of women in the unorganized sector. **It is necessary to increase the effectiveness of the dissemination of information by government to the people and to increase the awareness of the functionaries regarding work and problems of women.**

6.22 Reaching out to women cannot be an automatic process. It has been found that whenever efforts have been made, the message does reach them. Implementation is always difficult and we recommend, therefore, that considering the social set up in rural areas, **efforts must be made to involve gram sevikas and mukhya sevikas to take up the task of reaching out to women.**

### **Recommendations for Grass Roots Organizations**

6.23 Considering the effectiveness of the grass-roots organizations in reaching and mobilising the poor women, more support, both financial and in facilities should be given to these organizations.

6.24 Experiments on the lines of jatra, kriti, mahila mela should be encouraged; where women not only get exposure but a chance to express themselves.

6.25 It has been found that the use of multimedia has been functional. Hence, it is recommended that groups be encouraged to use both the folk and highly sophisticated electronic media. The creative use of puppets, story telling, songs with new content, role play and all other devices of participatory functioning should be used and also documented both in print and visual forms, so that other groups may learn from the experience. In a poor country



like ours. it would be wasteful expenditure for every group to start on a clean state. Replication and emulation be encouraged. This is not to deny the role of regional specificities. The detailed write up of the processes involved in participatory training prepared, for instance, by the Institute of Development Studies, Rajasthan, are very useful. This should be provided in the regional language so that more women could be reached.

6.26 Though alternative structures have been more effective in their understanding and in reaching out and getting participation of poor women, they are just a few drops in an ocean of invisibility. Hence, it is recommended that, wherever possible, mainstream media and organizations be used. This would not only be helpful in wider coverage, but hopefully in bridging the gap between the two.

6.27 To get more authentic picture of the exposure and use of the media, more research on audience, readers and viewers should be undertaken.

## **Legislative Protection**

7.1 The poor labouring women work in a situation of deprivation and exploitation. The Government has passed series of legislations to protect their status as workers, their remuneration and to ensure them certain benefits. Of all the labour legislations that are on the statute book, and which are directed towards the amelioration of the workers, Minimum Wages Act, 1948, claims to be the most important and relevant to the workers in the self-employed and unorganized sectors of employment. A large number of employments, including those in which women account for a significant, if not a substantial, proportion of workers, have not been included in the schedule to the Act by both the Central and State Government. Even where the minimum rates of wages are fixed or revised, they are grossly inadequate. But even more unsatisfactory is that even these low rates of wages are not implemented by and large. The enforcement machinery is both inadequate and indifferent, particularly in women-related employments. That the defaults take place in those sectors where the Government, both Centre and States, is the employer, as for example, in construction, in Relief works, in forestry, in Railways, Demonstration Farms, Free Trade Zones, Ports, Mines, is deplorable. The Government which is the biggest employer, instead of setting and example to others, itself becomes a defaulter, and where the Government is the defaulter, it is no wonder that the enforcement machinery, inefficient and indifferent as it is totally apathetic.

7.2 The other important legislations enacted are Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970. The Interstate Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act, 1979 the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961. Although the Government has progressive legislations in practice the poor working women have been denied the benefits under such legislations for various reasons. Apart from the implementation machinery being poor and ineffective, some employers have been resorted to retrenching women or not employing women to avoid their statutory responsibility. Being unorganized, individual working women are not in a position to exert pressure on the implementing agencies and being poor without having adequate work around the year they cannot afford to resort to legal remedies which are both cumbersome and expensive.

7.3 Moreover, the basic feature of all the labour legislations is the existence of employer-employee relationship and the consequent need to define an employer and the employee. However, the normal labour laws become in-applicable or unenforceable in the case of majority of women workers who are engaged in agriculture or construction work, home-based work and it becomes necessary to evolve patterns and systems by which, through some kind of self-regulating mechanism in which women have an empowering role,



the denied results could be achieved. Seeing the complexities of the situation in which the poor labouring women work, the National Commission recommends the following:-

1. The major contributory cause for women being compelled to take up unremunerative and arduous occupations, is a total lack of choice. We, therefore, consider that **the women as also the men, must have a right to employment. We also recommend that "the right to work", already a Directive Principle should be made a Fundamental Right.**

2. Coupled with the right to employment is the women's right to a reasonable wage. The rates of minimum wage now prevailing are very low and will have to be increased keeping in view the requirements of the woman worker and her family. The rates of wages must be such as would enable a woman worker to earn at least Rs. 500/- per month. The production process must be so organized as to enable the woman get adequate employment and to earn Rs. 500/- per month from her labour. The wages should be paid in full and in time. In a majority of situations women workers' wages are fixed on a piece-rate basis. The present system of fixing piece-rate is neither scientific nor equitable. We recommend that **the piece-rate must be so fixed that it will enable women workers to earn for 8 hours work a wage equal to the time rated minimum wage. Where the work is carried out in the homes of the women workers, consequent on which the employer saves on installation, supervisory cost, equipment and sometimes even on raw-materials, an additional amount calculated at 25 per cent of the minimum rate of wages will have to be paid. There should be a system of fall-back wages being paid in situation where an employer is not able to provide a full day's employment. Exemption from payment of minimum wages under any circumstances should be prohibited. There should be, system of a national or regional minimum wage.**

3. Despite the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 being on the statute book for over 12 years, discrimination in the matter of wages is widely prevalent. This must be corrected through better enforcement and also wide dissemination of the scope and content of the law. The tendency to classify tasks, generally done by women, to be of a slightly inferior nature, should be corrected. For this purpose, it is necessary to broad-band into one category those activities which are of the same or similar nature of work.

4. To ensure that employment of women does not get reduced, as it has been happening in the past, particularly in industries like cotton textiles, jute, coal-mining, we recommend that **the retrenchment of women in any establishment (irrespective of the number of persons employed) must require the prior permission of a designated authority.** Consistent with this, the provision of 'last come, first go' in the matter of retrenchment should not be made applicable to women workers.

5. The National Commission also recommends the setting up of an **Equal Opportunities Commission to be set up under a Central Law which must have wide powers of investigations, direction advice and monitoring.** It ought to have, like, the Monopolies and Restricted Trade Practices Commission, a separate wing for investigation which can take up investigation either on a complaint or a reference made, or suo moto. The Equal Opportunities Commission should, like in Britain undertake promotional and educational work, providing advice to employers and employees, to trade unions and professional bodies and the central and the State Governments. It should also be empowered to make grants to other bodies and individuals for independent research projects or for educational activities or training programmes. It will also have its own research services. Such a Commission should be a watch-dog organisation, with teeth, to oversee the implementation of laws and policies in all areas involving women, including employment, conditions of work, provision of maternity and child care facilities, property rights including right over matrimonial property, educational opportunities and training opportunities. The Equal Opportunaty Commission may be required

to present to Parliament each year a report on its activities and findings; this report must be enabled to be discussed in both houses of Parliament as well as in the various State Legislatures in adequate detail. This Commission, the existence of which must be widely made known, would be a forum whose doors would always be open to anyone, more particularly women who have not received a fair and equal deal at someones hands.

6. The Commission recommends establishment of Tripartite Boards, for the reason that no law, however, well conceived will be of benefit to women workers unless they have a major hand in the implementation of these laws and this should be achieved only at a Tripartite Board in which workers will have as many representative as the Government and employers to give them knowledge. Women\* workers will be adequately represented proportionately to their numerical strength. The Tripartite Boards will not only regulate the implementation of legislation, but also contribute in making women workers visible and to bring to focus the contribution they make to the family income and to the economy and above all in empowering them, to understand their rights and to demand them, not merely as beneficiaries under any paternalistic system but as partners and participants in a production process. Given the nature of shifting employer-employee relationship and even the denial of such relationship and the consequent difficulty in even getting due wages paid in full and on time, the case for Tripartite Boards needs no argument. There is no other method by which employer-employee nexus can be established, the Tripartite Board arrangement providing for a corpus of employers and corpus of employees, instead of individual employer with his employees. In this type of arrangement, it will also be possible for the Board to take on planning functions in respect of the activity concerned, to encourage promotion of cooperatives wherever feasible with the Board helping the cooperative in the matter of supply of raw materials and marketing.

7. The Commission recommends the setting up of a Central Fund from which welfare and social security measures for women workers should be financed. Apart from a levy on individual employers it would be desirable that levy is imposed on the major industries or substitute industries for the benefit of the small activities that the home based workers carry on. Even now, there is the practice of levying a cess on the organised cotton textile mill sector for helping the handloom sector. In the beedi rolling industry, a levy is imposed on the bidies rolled for financing welfare activities for the workers. Similar arrangements could be thought of including a levy on exports for example on the garment export industry or gem cutting industry; likewise the plastic industry could be made to contribute for the welfare of worker in these sectors where the demand for their product are adversely affected by competition from the plastic goods. Sources of such additional funding can be explored.

8. All dues payable by the employer towards wages or levy must be made the first charge; their recovery where it becomes necessary, must be through a summary procedure. To ensure that no defaults occur, it would be necessary to have some hold on the activities of the employer, either through licensing authorities or tax authorities.

9. It is recommended that the Labour Department must be the nodal Department for enforcement of all Labour Laws. There should be a separate wing in the Labour Department for unorganised workers and there should be adequate number of women employees at various places.

10. The Commission recommends that Women's organisations, trade unions, worker's representatives, Government's women functionaries and individual workers be vested with powers to inspect work sites and to file complaints on behalf of the workers.

11. It is recommended that penalties for infringement of labour laws which effect

women should be made **most stringent** and any further default to be made a continuing offence.

12. It came to the notice of the Commission that cases in Labour Courts take unduly long to get disposed of. The Commission recommends that **Labour Courts and trade authorities be vested with ministerial powers and time limits for filing claims of objections to be fixed and periodical review be made.**

13. The burden of proof of establishing that Labour Laws and rules have not been implemented to be wholly on the employer.

14. Free legal aid for women workers should be made available in practice.

15. The Commission recommends that wherever necessary the changes in labour laws should be brought about. In view of the Commission's recommendations an omnibus legislation may be undertaken to amend the relevant laws suitably.

16. The Commission strongly recommends a **special drive for imparting legal literary to women workers so as to enable them to be aware of the existing legislations and the methodologies through which they can take benefit under the legislation.**

17. A comprehensive Minor Forest Produce Workers Act may be enacted on the lines of Beedi and Cigar Workers Act so that the working condition is regulated and social security as well as accident compensation are provided and piece rate is fixed in consultation with labour representatives. This would imply, as it should in all fairness, that these women who collect minor forest produce are actually the workers under either the Contractors or the Forest Department and not under sub-contractors. The cane and bamboo workers should be provided bamboo or cane on priority and at concessional rates while bamboo should not be given to paper industry. The workers must be able to get a licence in a quick and easy way on a mere payment of a fee.

18. Cooperative law exists at each state level except the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act. Most State laws vie with each other for being anti-cooperative. The laws have provided unlimited powers to Registrar for registration, bye laws, elections, appointment of staff, and investment of funds and thus interfere in the running of the society and can even supersede the elected committee and appoint members, thus controlling the cooperative and killing the cooperative spirit. The corruption in the cooperative department and harassment methods adopted by the department are well-known. So, for the illiterate women labour to cooperate and improve their conditions, it is necessary to ensure; that the Department facilitates the formation of co-operatives rather than exploit them. The Registrar could regulate the co-operatives and not manage them.

Keeping in view the delays experienced in getting Co-operatives registered under the relevant State Cooperative Societies Acts, it is for consideration whether a scheme of provisional registration within a month of the application being made can be incorporated in the law. Such a provisional registration, apart from giving encouragement to the promoters that their application is not gathering dust, can also provide for certain minimum benefits such as access to raw materials to the members. This intermediate stage can be like a letter of intent under the industrial licencing procedure, with the full registration being compared to the grant of industrial licence.

19. Child Labour: With the provision of child care on the lines recommended in Chapter-4 earlier by us we believe that enrolment of children particularly girls in the school will improve. We are strongly of the view that with the provision of guaranteed employment and adequate wages to the mother, there will be no need for child labour and we recommend that child labour must be abolished by 2000 A.D., in a phased manner, starting from 1988. The child should certainly not be prevented from learning any of crafts and trades of the parents but this

should be only as learner and not as a wage learner and should not in any event, be at the cost of her schooling.

## **Organising**

8.1 The National Commission has observed that the lack of organisation in the informal sector is the root cause of exploitation of women workers. At present, the process of organisation for women workers is very limited and fragmented. Individually women are not in a position to fight against low and discriminatory wages and exploitative working conditions as they lack bargaining power. Laws will also not be so flagrantly violated if workers are organised. At the same time attempts at organising are thwarted by vested interests resulting in further victimization.

8.2 The Commission recommends evolving of a strategy to promote organising of women on a large scale. The government should play an active and positive role in this context. All government projects, schemes and programmes for the poor should have a component of organising as this can become a direct investment in building the people's base. There should be a proper orientation of government functionaries to support organising while they are engaged in developmental and welfare activities. The National Commission further recommends active state support for formation of associations by simplification of rules, establishing of information centres and introduction of progressive legislation. Further the approach of the State towards demand for a legal right should be a positive one, the state agencies such as the police should not look on such demands as law and order problem but rather protect the workers from oppressive vested interests. Apart from the government, voluntary agencies, Mahila Mandal, Cooperatives and Trade Unions can play an effective role in organisation of women workers in the Self-employed and the informal sector.

8.3 Organising being such a specialized activity, the need for proper training cannot be gainsaid. The National Commission recommends, that the state should provide resources for training in the area through Workers Education Boards and Social Welfare Boards at the Central and State level. Further centres for training should be established for this purpose.

## **Women's Voluntary Groups**

8.4 At present, there are two types of voluntary groups working in the field of women. One is an organisation not necessarily of women, but working for women and secondly, an organisation of women, working for women. Although the number of women's own organisations need to be greatly increased, both types of organisations should be encouraged. The spread of these organisation is not uniform throughout the country, their numbers are small largely concentrated in township, urban areas and district headquarters. The activities of these groups are also of a limited nature. Some of them take up welfare activities like child care, destitute women, short stay centres and crisis centres. Some of them have taken up developmental activities, but these are generally linked with the Government schemes under which grants are available.

8.5 Since the voluntary organisations have the advantage of community involvement, and help to promote voluntary action, the National Commission recommends that they should be actively assisted by providing finances training and managerial inputs.

The organisations, should be encouraged to enlarge their activities to:

- a) Create awareness.
- b) Mobilise and organise poor women.
- c) Carry out training programmes for creating awareness and leadership amongst women.
- d) Formulate and implement developmental and economic projects for women. Such

projects should not be restricted to Government schemes only. They should carry out new projects which will meet the realistic needs of the women which have not been taken into account by developmental agencies.

- f) The creativity and innovativeness of the voluntary groups should be encouraged by providing flexibility in their programmes.

8.6 The Government should provide legislative support and removal of restrictive legislation, need to be done if voluntary agencies can play such a role:.

### **Mahila Mandals**

8.6 In many States, mahila mandals exist historically e.g. in the North East, they are playing a significant role in the community. In other States, village level mahila mandals have come up after Independence. Their role has not been effective, nor have they been able to involve a majority of the poor women in the village.

8.7 With the spread of development and poverty alleviation programmes, reaching the interior parts of the country, women in the villages have become aware, and are eager to do something to improve their situation. Many mahila mandals, so far dormant are today eager for action.

8.8 The Commission also observed that the mahila mandals have tremendous potential in actively involving village women in changing the rural scene. But this potential is still not utilised.

8.9 The Commission perceives the village mahila mandal as a suitable vehicle for change. Therefore, it strongly recommends the following:

1. The village mahila mandal should be vigorously utilised in the implementation of the poverty alleviation programmes of the Government. The village mahila mandal should be entrusted with the responsibility of identifying IRDP beneficiaries. The list submitted by the village mahila mandal should carry enough weightage at the decision making level. The village mahila mandal may also be entrusted to prepare a list of work-site and proposed programmes under NREP, TRYSEM, RLEGP, Social Forestry and the like.
2. The mahila mandal should be encouraged to initiate innovative programmes like smokeless chullah, sulabh laterines, income generating skill trainings, water management and biogas plants.
3. The Government should provide adequate support for the mahila mandal in the form of resources like funds, a pucca house, a battery transistor and a tape-recorder, electronically recorded songs, dramas, which carry effective messages, information.
4. The mahila mandal should be provided with guidance from the earlier proposed District Women's Development Officer, under the proposed Development officers will be in charge of monitoring and liasing areas.

8.10 The Government must give recognition to the mahila mandals. There will be resistance from the local officials and vested interest groups against the mahila mandal getting active, so a strong sustained support will be absolutely necessary from the Government. The mahila mandals may take mistakes, they will take time to prepare for themselves this role, but once they become active, they will be in a position to energise the mass of women workers. The Commissions recognises that this is the only way to involve village women actively in the development process.

### **Cooperatives**

8.11 The experience with cooperatives has been a mixed one. While it has been successful in certain sectors like dairying, and in certain states like Gujarat, and Maharashtra, it has not been successful in other enterprises and States. Yet, the importance of the

cooperative as a whole in organising people, in enhancing productivity and employment, in equitable distribution of profits, is well recognised by the Government and by workers themselves. However, the participation of women in the cooperative movement is very limited. This is because of illiteracy, cumbersome procedures of enrolment and registration of cooperatives, inadequate financial support and marketing facilities, and finally the lack of effective leadership. The Commission is convinced that without women workers being organized, there can be no substantial improvement in their employment status. The cooperative is an important forum which can meet the needs of Self-Employed Women. In setting up the Cooperatives every caution should be exercised that they work in the interest of the poor women. To overcome these problems enumerated, the National Commission recommends that:

1. There should be an **expansion of the coverage of the cooperative movement in new and important areas like farm labour, artisans, cereal processing, fodder and fuel development, fruit preservation and agro-based industries.**

2. In most general cooperatives, we have seen that women are left out of the membership of the cooperative because they do not own any assets, like land, handloom, cattle for example, in the case of weavers, women do a lot of pre-weaving and post-weaving processes, but, since the loom is in the name of the man, women are not made members. The same is true of many artisans' trades. The Commission, therefore, recommends that **when a particular kind of work is done jointly by men and women, in a family, both of them should be made members of the cooperative. Forming of women's cooperatives should be encouraged and even in mixed cooperatives, they should be inducted as office bearers.**

3. A practical difficulty in forming a cooperative arises as many of the concerned persons for example in urban slums do not have any permanent address. It is suggested that the concerned authority should recognise that **if the organization which is working for these people have a permanent address that can be considered adequate for the personal identity/security of the workers.**

4. The common experience all over the country is that, due to the corruption and bureaucratic red tapism, the registration of a cooperative takes anywhere from one to four years and the procedures are too cumbersome. Therefore, a practical solution could be that, **like the credit camps which are held at the district level at present, there should be camps organised for registration of cooperatives where the applicant cooperative should be invited with all the relevant papers, and the concerned official would also come with all the necessary documents and during the camp itself all the formalities could be finalised so that the cooperatives can be registered in a short period, or provisional registration can be given.** To catalyse and mobilise women to enter the cooperatives, the Commission recommends:

8.12 **A spearhead team** of trained women and men should be formed to reach potential, members in the female-prone large employment sectors like agriculture, dairying, fisheries. In this context, it is essential to prescribe a pre-cooperative phase, therefore, the Commission strongly recommends the government:

1. **to recognise fully the need of pre-cooperative phase of one to three years;**
2. to provide the required training in women in development issues to build up the consciousness of the rural poor women.
3. to provide technical training to women producers to maximise outputs.
4. to build up all the credit/subsidy linkages to ensure poor women's access to finance for the inputs in their names.

5. to provide sufficient time for a strong group of women producers to emerge, which can facilitate their self-management of their cooperatives.

6. to develop their capability of dealing with government officials and local vested interests.

8.13 The Commission draws attention of the government to the fact that it is a long and painful process for poor women to rise to be partners in the cooperatives and be entrepreneurs, from the existing status of labourers. They need a strong and sympathetic constant support from the government at every level, particularly at the local level.

8.14 Adequate funds should be flowing in the form of loans from NABARD, other banks and financial institutions to make the cooperative viable. The Commission also recommends to the Cooperative Banks that:

1. all efforts should be done to reach, at least **10 per cent of its lending to women engaged in homebased and small industries, and for building up assets** like land, cattle, house, workshed, equipments and tools in the ownership of women.

2. **To earmark soft loans and subsidies from the Bank's own finances, and from the governments for women borrowers, and fix targets** accordingly, every year.

8.15 The experience of the women's Cooperative Bank is encouraging in helping women having control over her own economy, therefore, the Commission recommends to the government **to plan for a woman's Cooperative Bank in every district in the next decade, the rules and regulations should be accordingly modified to reach poor and rural women to the maximum.**

8.16 Training in the formation of cooperatives, and running of cooperatives which include training in organization of skills, book-keeping and accounts and organization, should be imparted.

8.17 The cooperative should be in a position to supply to its members assistance, not only in the form of loans but assist in acquiring assets and raw materials. To the extent to which what has been said earlier under the section on "Credit, Raw Materials and Marketing" is implemented cooperatives will be successful.

8.18 The cooperatives should also be in a position to assist the members in procuring orders and developing markets.

8.19 **The Departments of Women and Child Development/Social Welfare in the States should be entrusted with power to do registration of women's cooperatives and societies.**

8.20 To increase representation of women in cooperatives, the Commission recommends that:

1. **on the Management Committees/Boards of Management of all cooperatives and Federations, there should be at least two women.** Necessary changes should be done in the related laws and bye-laws.

2. in various cooperatives, the government has its representatives sitting on Management Committees/Boards. These seats can be utilised to nominate women on them, by the government. This will make a beginning for the women to learn to manage the affairs of the cooperative.

3. in the newly formed cooperatives, **a precondition should be laid out that 50 per cent of the membership should be of women, and thereby also in the Management Committees.**

This rule should be strictly followed in cooperatives in female dominated employment sectors viz. agriculture, dairying, fisheries, handloom-handicraft, sericulture and forestry.

## Trade Unions

8.21 Large-scale industrialisation in India, which began roughly at the time of independence, was modelled on the developed nations. The direction of the labour movement, and the role of the State/Government in protecting the interest of the employees, were all based on the models of these highly industrialised countries. However, in spite of the impetus given to industrialisation, our economy is still largely agricultural and has not become industrialised as a whole. This has resulted in a situation where only 11 per cent of the working population (predominantly men) are engaged in regular jobs with the recognised employer-employee relationship. The remaining 89 per cent of the working population (more than half of whom are women) earn their livelihood through own self-employment. These workers lack security of service, and regularity of work and income. Since they rarely own their means of work, they are forced to work as piece-rate workers, contract labourers, farm labourers, and providers of services in their homes and outside. The labour movement has not yet touched the vast majority of workers in the self-employed and informal sectors. Barring a few local level unions in the country, the major labour unions are still engaged in the problems of the workers in the organised sector. In a country like ours, most of the goods and services are provided by the self-employed and informal sectors of the economy. **The Commission feels unless the workers in these sectors whose need for unionisation and protection is the greatest, are brought into the mainstream of the labour movement, the latter has very little relevance for them. It is high time the major labour unions took the labour of the unorganised sector in their fold and extend their trade union knowhow in bringing better income and social security to them.**

The National Commission recommends that

1. All the major labour unions should be encouraged to **establish a separate wing for the unorganised labour.**
2. The women's wing of major labour unions should be given more resources and support by the Labour Ministry to unionise the unorganised women and integrate them in the main body of the union.
3. The major labour unions should be requested to take up surveys of the problems of contract labour, home based workers, out-workers in the major industries and trades, bring out in-depth studies and influence the government in suitable changes in policy and law.
4. The major trade unions should be supported on their efforts in building up solidarity between the workers of the formal sector and the informal sector within a particular trade/industry/plant/unit. For example, in the textile industry, right from the cotton pickers in the fields to the spinners in the homes to the screen printers in the textile mills, all labour engaged whether on regular salaried job or as contract labourers may be made members of one union.
5. The major labour unions, apart from resorting to collective bargaining activities, should be encouraged in the government to take up various constructive programmes to augment the economic and social life of the workers in the self-employed and informal sectors.

## Training

9.1 Training for the women workers themselves, and for extension workers in the different Departments dealing with these women, is necessary to change the social thinking and attitudes which are detrimental to women. In so far as the women themselves are concerned, even if they are literate they do not have the training which will help them to expand their existing ventures or start new ones for which they need skills in marketing in acquiring credit, maintenance of accounts and procedures in project formulation. Packages of



programmes should be prepared which will give training to women through various channels and encourage the growth of entrepreneurship, organizing, general awareness and knowledge of legal matters. The Central/State Social welfare Boards, Women Development Corporations, Anganwadi Training Centres, schools of social work, may be used in addition to other training centres, for imparting training for all programmes under which training is given to women by various agencies, this component should be added.

9.2 The National Commission recommends that voluntary agencies be sanctioned grants for implementation of programmes for women in areas of health, communication and welfare. In the sanction letter **a condition should be placed maintaining that a certain number of hours per week should be devoted to impart training in areas of building leadership, organising, accounting and general awareness.**

9.3 The extension workers are expected to play the roll of catalyst. Therefore, it is necessary that they are periodically trained. Short orientation courses should be held by which they are sensitised to the problems of women, and implement the programmes in a manner which would assist women. They have to be trained to help women or groups of women to take advantage of various types of facilities available under government, semi-government and banking and financial institutions, and to organize themselves in cooperatives, mahila mandals and other types of organisation.

9.4 The third category of personnel to be trained at the grassroots level are the representatives of the voluntary agencies. There are very few voluntary agencies which impart the skills in organising women in acquiring skills relating to credit, raw-materials, marketing and how to prepare projects and apply for loans, and subsidies. A larger number of voluntary agencies need to take up this work and they have to be trained in this respect.

9.5 As far as the infrastructure for training is concerned, it has to be developed at the district level, divisional level, state level and national level. At the national level, an Institute of Training should be set up which, apart from carrying out training programmes will also formulate guidelines and help the other constituent units at the State level, divisional level and district level to carry out training programme.

9.6 Vocational Training Institutes, Industrial Technical Institutes, Polytechnics etc. should hold regular meetings with local industrialists to know their general and specific demands, and organize training programmes accordingly. **Especially for women and young girls in rural areas, setting up of a large number of polytechniques is essential, with dormitory and creche facilities, in order to provide them with skills that have a real value in their own environment, and which will provide them a steady income.** Examples are repair and maintenance of charkhas, handlooms, waterpumps, biogas plant and training in poultry, cattle care, veterinary, service, testing of milk, simple accountancy, making smokeless chullaahs, sulabh shauchalayas, sockpits and such other useful trades and services.

9.7 Follow-up guidance should be provided to trainee to enable her to get a job or to start her own enterprise.

9.8 Although the Commission is not in favour of recommending reservation in jobs, it strongly recommends reservation of seats in vocational training institutes. **At least 30 per cent of the seats should be reserved for women. In order to give priority to poor women, the Commission recommends that reservation should not be only on the basis of academic qualifications, but also on income levels. The entry in the trades should be such that women's employment opportunities are diversified and do not remain stereotyped and sex based.**

9.9 The extension service provided in this field should be strengthened, **the number of women extension workers should be increased.** They should help women by not only

improving information of Government's schemes under which benefits can be availed of, but should actively assist women in taking advantage of these schemes and training and programmes assisting them to form cooperatives and societies like Mahila Mandals. The Mahila Mandals should be energised to promote more economic activities and assist women groups to get subsidies, fertilisers, etc.

9.10 The Commission has also observed that the number of women cultivators is declining. The distribution of surplus land has not benefited the poor women. Such distributions should be followed with concrete steps of providing assistance in improving land and bringing them into cultivation.

9.11 Women's cooperatives should be encouraged to involve women in management decision making.

9.12 Women should be mentioned as specific target groups for all agricultural development programmes and efforts should be made to involve them in decision making at all the levels.

9.13 Continuous monitoring should be done of women's programmes so as to improve the programme designing and implementation.

## Supportive Services and other Programmes:

10.1. In line with our approach that all women are 'workers', the distinguishing feature of a woman worker is her responsibility for bearing and rearing children. In addition, the responsibility of doing all household chores and looking after the aged and sick have traditionally been her responsibility. It is for these reasons that the woman worker in the informal sector has to go through her life of drudgery, juggling long hours of arduous work with no respite. It is, therefore, necessary that social support services should be provided to women workers for assisting them to do their work at home and outside, better and with less worry.

### Maternity Benefits and Child Care Facilities

10.2. The Commission is of the considered opinion that **no solution to the problems of women at work will be complete without taking into account her reproductive functions.** This can be effectively tackled through maternity benefits and child care. **The maternity benefits, on the scale provided under the Maternity Benefits Act, should be universally available to all women. The responsibility for this should be borne by all employers, irrespective of whether or not they employ women through a levy calculated as a percentage of the wage bill and placed in a separate fund from which the maternity benefits can be provided. In respect of a large number of women, like home-based workers and others where the employer is not identifiable, the responsibility for providing maternity benefits must lie with the State Governments.** We do not consider it necessary to restrict the benefit to two or three confinements because we are satisfied that the universal availability of maternity benefit and child care will, in the long run, lead to smaller families.

10.3. Child care facilities are provided in various labour laws. However, it is distressing to note that the provisions of the Labour Law are not being implemented in favour of women and at times it has led to retrenchment of women workers because the employers would like to evade their statutory responsibility. It is, therefore, **necessary to ensure an extended system of child care throughout the country.** This will directly help in reducing the burden on women and in the all round development of the child. The National Commission recommends

the following:

1. **All child care services should meet the intersecting needs of women and girls.** They should provide for the healthy development and welfare for the young child, meeting the need, of the working mothers for healthy and convenient places for her children while she is at work to eliminate the burden of child care for older children especially girls to enable them to attend schools.
2. **Better and effective implementation of the Labour Laws which provide for child care facilities.** The implementation machinery should be strengthened.
3. **A substantial increase in the number of creches all over the country with improved facilities, better infrastructure and flexible timings** so that mothers are encouraged to send their children to the centres.
4. **The existing Anganwadi Centres under the ICDS need to be upgraded with proper day care centres** so that the full working hours of the mother are taken care of.
5. The setting up of **family based day care centres with support from voluntary agencies.** This centre will be set up by suitably trained individual local workers, preferably in their own homes, to take care of a certain number of children.
6. The setting up of **social based day care centres under the auspices of the local primary schools.** This will help in relieving the older girl child of the care of siblings and serve the dual purpose of encouraging enrolment of girls in school and the care of primary children.
7. Setting up of **women's organisation-based day care centres supported by cooperatives, mahila mandals and unions.** This will enable women who are associated with these organisations to utilize the facilities provided by these centres and expertise available at these organisations could be useful in running these centres.
8. Setting up of **mobile day care units for migrant/shifting workers to be run by an independent agency but funded by the employer.** This will be seen on the line of mobile creches which have proved quite successful in Bombay and Delhi.
9. New approaches and diverse programmes for working groups including home based workers and seasonal agricultural workers. **Since child care is essentially an individual oriented programme, innovations will have to be made to cater to the needs of various groups.** Such innovations should be promoted by the Government in consultation with women workers voluntary agencies and experts in the field of child care.
10. Child care, by its very nature is a small scale and localised operation, which has to respond to the needs of women, children and girls. For this, **a three tier structure is recommended. The actual running of the service should be at the local level entrusted to organizations like balwadis and anganwadis, mahila mandals, panchayats, cooperatives and unions. The supervision, funding, training and monitoring should be at an intermediary level entrusted to organisations like voluntary agencies, district authorities, municipal authorities, charitable trusts and public sector undertakings. At the apex level, there should be an umbrella organisation functioning as an autonomous body similar to the Labour Welfare Board under the joint auspices of the Ministries/ Departments of Women and Child Development, Education, and Labour.**
11. It is recommended that **funds from such a service should be drawn from the budgetary provisions made in the budgets of Ministry/Department of Labour, Women and Child Development and Education, from employers in the form of a welfare cess to be uniformly applied to all employers/producers regardless of the number of employees and the sex of the worker employed, from worker parents in the form of contributions from trade unions and in other cases through individual contributions made directly at the local level.**

## Support for Destitute Women

10.4. The incidence of destitution is quite high amongst the labouring women in poverty. This situation may arise as a result of widowhood; migration, illness of the husband or as a result of his addictive habits like alcoholism or taking of drugs. In this context, the National Commission recommends—

1. Labelling of such vulnerable women as 'destitutes', 'distressed', 'helpless' is counter productive and does not help them in the long run. **Their worth as workers should be recognised and the entire approach should be from that angle.**

2. The number of short stay homes and crises homes are very meagre, their numbers are required to be substantially augmented.

3. The running of the homes also needs to be monitored closely to ensure the well-being of the inmates and prevent them from becoming victims of corruption and mismanagement. They need a well trained staff who can understand their needs as also counselling services.

4. Inputs of vocational training and medical health should be inbuilt in the running of the homes.

5. Training and upgradation of skills should be followed up by placements in jobs and services as a top most priority so that such women can become self-reliant and independent.

6. Voluntary agencies are already working in the field of helping destitute women. They need to be encouraged through financial assistance. The quantum of assistance should take into view that some of the workers are required to be professionals and well-paid. Representatives of voluntary agencies need regular orientation courses to keep them abreast with new techniques and development. Some of these agencies are being operated as in the nineteenth century.

## Old Age Pension

10.5. The State as well as society owes a debt to those people who because of their advanced age are no longer in a position to work but have contributed their due share all their working lives. The plight of old women who in a majority of cases are widows, is pathetic as they have no social security, and no savings, and are reduced to a State of beggary. A scheme of old age pension and pension for widows in there is many of the States but the amount given (like Rs. 60/- P.M.) is very meagre. It is often delayed because of late sanction of budget and those whose adult sons are employed are not eligible for the pension. The National Commission recommends the following measures to alleviate their condition-

1. The meagre amount of pension should be enhanced and supplemented with some monthly provisions of foodgrains and supply of a saree every six months through fair price shops and priority in getting free medical treatment.

2. The delay in getting pension should be totally eliminated and the amounts, both in cash and kind, should be disbursed regularly on the stipulated dates.

3. The linkage with the income of sons cuts at the very root of self dependence. She is left at the mercy of her son who in such circumstances of poverty and deprivation is in any case not inclined to help. Pension should be given irrespective of the employment of the son and based on the rights of the woman alone, who has contributed in her life time as producer and reproducer.

4. In case of younger widows, the thrust should be to provide her without suitable training and employment opportunities. **She should be given preference in training, in asset building and in getting loans.**

## Prostitutes/devdasis.

10.6. In India, like in other developing countries, women get into the profession of

prostitution due to poverty and lack of employment opportunities. In some parts of the country, there is a practice of Devdasis. Although the practice of devdasis is carried under the name of religion, a girl at a very young age is dedicated to goddess by the parents), the root cause is poverty. The conservative and male dominated society gives social acceptance to the practice by giving it a religious sanction. These women live in poverty and earn as long as they are young. They do not have any social and emotional security nor any public sympathy and support.

10.7. Prostitutes/devdasis suffer from a number of health problems, particularly from sexually transmitted diseases. The prostitutes with whom the Commission members talked to also said that they are sick for 10 to 15 days in a month. During this period, they cannot even earn any income. At the Municipal/Government hospitals they are looked down upon and not given proper medical treatment, and the private doctors charge exorbitant for medicines.

10.8. The Commission recommends that there should be regular health check up and clinics for these women. They should be located preferably in the neighbourhoods where they live.

10.9. The prostitutes have to live a secluded life due to their low-status in the society. Their children become victims of this social ostracism. These women try their best to give better life to their children, but they cannot overcome the social attitudes which always make their children aware that their mother is 'bad woman' and they can never be accepted as 'normal' by the society. They find it very humiliating when their children are denied admission in good schools because they cannot give their father's name at the time of admission. The Commission recommends that there should be a policy that father's name should not be required for admission in a school.

10.10. It is also recommended that there should be more openings for residential schools for different income-groups and children of prostitutes should be given admission in residential schools on priority.

10.11. These women, due to the socially unacceptable life they are leading, are generally cut-off from family relationship and are not married. So, in their old age, they do not have anyone to depend on. Many of them have a resort to begging. The Commission strongly recommends for an old age pension scheme which will help them take care of their basic necessities and children's education.

10.12. Alternate employment: Most of the women get into this occupation when there are no other alternatives for survival, in the condition of poverty. If there is an alternative available, many women would like to leave the dehumanising occupation and lead a dignified life. In Nipani, some activities have tried to rehabilitate devdasis and provide training for self-employment. There is a need for more effort to provide training and employment to these women to offer them a better way of life. And the alternative provided should be attractive enough, so that the women are not driven back to their earlier profession.

10.13. The women who try to run away from the brothels and take shelter find it extremely difficult to get support/shelter. The homes for destitute women, 'Nari Niketans' should be more flexible so that the woman has an assurance of getting a shelter.

10.14. In IRDP female-headed households are assisted with loans. But in the case of devdasis who invariably are the sole earners, are not accepted as IRDP beneficiaries. In this regard, the Commission recommends that in all anti-poverty programmes, their economic status should be considered.

10.15. The situation of these women should be regarded with sympathy by all those who are trying to help these women instead of taking a moralistic stand. Also, a more integrated approach towards their rehabilitation including shelter, employment, and education

for their children, should be adopted by the helping agencies.

### **Drug Addiction**

10.16. The drug menace is not only limited to the urban elite but has also spread to urban slums and rural areas. The problem has taken the form of a serious crisis in the border States like Manipur and Nagaland in the North-east. Women are the worst sufferers of the drug problem in their family. Due to the addiction, the male members, particularly the young and able-bodied, do not provide any economic contribution.

10.17. On the contrary, they become a burden to the family and take away whatever little earnings the women bring in the house after working for 12-14 hours per day. The Commission's recommendations are towards reducing the plight of these women.

1. There should be strict enforcement of laws to prevent drug trafficking and exemplary penalties in case of violation of the law.

2. The women, whose husbands/sons are known to be addicts, should be given priority for anti-poverty/development programmes instead of considering only families where the male member is absent.

3. A more community based approach should be adopted in the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts. The deaddiction centres and curative services should not only be limited to urban areas but spread to remote rural areas.

4. Local women's groups, like the Mothers' Club in Nagaland, should be involved in identification of cases, treatment and rehabilitation of addicts.

5. These local centres can be provided training by an expert who can also design and implement the plan for awareness building about drug addiction and measures to be taken by the family of the addicts. The Government, at all levels, should support this activity.

### **Alcoholism**

10.18. All over the country, the Commission met many women who were agitated over one common issue that was ruining their life—alcoholism amongst the men in their family and in the community.

10.19. Women are directly affected by this problem. A large number of women are the sole supporters of their families due to the alcoholism amongst their husbands. The men not only do not contribute, but even take away whatever income the wife brings into the family. Harassment including wife-beating and violence in the family are closely related to the problem of alcoholism. Their children are also affected by this.

10.20. At the community level, the women find that their safety is at stake due to increasing incidence of alcoholism. Particularly in hilly areas, women are scared of sending their daughters to school or coming back late in the evening after work due to their increasing incidence of alcoholism. They do not even find support or security from the police or other powerful men in the community. The Commission recommends:

1. Although in a number of places during the tour women recommended total prohibition, the Commission feels that total prohibition may not be a realistic solution. But steps should be taken to discourage opening of new liquor shops.

The Governmental approach needs to be altered. It should not just view liquor as a source of income to the revenue department but also consider the social implications before taking any policy decisions. The women in H.P. said "We have been asking for schools since the last 20 years but we have not got any yet, we have not asked for a theka (liquor shop) but still every few months new thekas are coming up to. The Government should have a policy about the number of shops permissible depending on the population of the region. Beyond that, no new

licences should be issued. The policy and the rules laid down should be strictly enforced.

2. All the unauthorised liquor dens should be evicted and the Government at the local level (police, municipality) should not support these activities.

3. Strict action should be taken by the State Government against the offenders and the local officials who are involved or supporting these activities.

4. Before opening any new liquor shop in a village, the Panchayat/Government should take public opinion and a new shop should be sanctioned only if a majority (2/3) of the population give their opinion in favour of opening of new liquor shops.

5. No liquor shops should be opened within 3 kms. from schools, colleges or bus stop.

6. There should be proper regulation about the number, location and timings of the liquor shops and strict enforcement of these regulations have to be done.

7. **Mahila Mandals should be given powers, parallel to the Panchayat, so that their opinion can influence the local power structure. The Experience of many grassroots organisations like AMM, Bombay and SUTRA, HP has demonstrated that in our country, specially amongst poor women, the problem of alcoholism can be tackled better by organizing (community approach) the women rather than the individual counselling approach.** It is essential to see this problem as social rather than individual or personal problem of the family of the alcoholics.

8. In many parts of the country brewing liquor is very common. It is generally observed that illicit brewing amongst the poor is carried out more for subsistence in the agricultural economy. There is no regular employment throughout the year. Therefore, provisions of alternate source of employment and regulation of employment conditions would considerably reduce the incidence of illicit brewing of liquor.

9. There should be policy that in the case of women whose alcoholic husbands are in regular jobs, the major part of the men's salaries should directly go to the wife. Then she will have some control over the family income.

10. Special efforts should be made to include the wives of alcoholics in all anti-poverty programmes and particularly to give them assets in their names. This will give the women some security, because the man would not be able to sell off the assets as easily as he can take away the cash/money from the wife.

## **Housing and Toilet Facilities**

10.21. Housing for the poor has been recognized as one of the basic requirements of human life. Housing for women have an added dimension since traditionally they rarely own land or house. Moreover it involves more than a roof over ones head: it includes social and community facilities and is connected with employment and earnings. For women who are more home-based and often use their home as workplace this is of crucial importance for them. The provision of housing has to be considered in the urban and the rural context separately since the situation in both is quite different.

10.22. The problem in urban areas concerns the slum dwellers who face terrible overcrowding, lack of essential services, terrorisation by local thugs and finally the constant threat of eviction and demolition.

10.23. The problem in rural areas relates to the progressive destruction of natural resources which has led to a crisis in the accessibility of land and local construction materials. Besides the houses themselves are poorly designed with no ventilation or outlet for smoke.

10.24. In this context and keeping the priorities of women in view the National Commission recommends

1. An integrated development plan for the country which must be eco-system based and

linked with other programmes like employment and income generation, education and provision of credit which fall under the purview of different Ministries.

2. Involvement in the planning stage itself of people for whom the houses are being planned, besides involvement of civic authorities who would be in charge of not only building but also development of the infrastructure.

3. Ongoing research on building technologies with the aim of reducing cost, simplifying designs, providing low cost sanitation and such provisions like smokeless chulas to improve the environment so that planners can make informed choices. Housing plans should take into account the needs of women, specially home based workers whose work place is the home.

4. Decentralised implementation of housing schemes with the participation of the local community. This will not only increase the involvement of the people but provide employment under various public and civic works of the PWD, CPWD and other state authorities.

5. Funds to be made available at affordable interest rates and in the joint name of the couple and in case of single woman without discrimination. Funds to the very poor should come in the form of building materials so that they are not tempted to diversify liquid cash.

6. The needs of special groups like destitute women, those living in disaster prone areas and migrant workers should be considered separately through providing destitute homes, community shelters.

7. A complete review of existing laws and legislation to provide for joint ownership of property, stricter tenurial rights and regulation of eviction and demolition which in case of the poor should be only with the provision of alternative homes.

10.25. The common problem faced by the majority of labouring women is the lack of toilet facilities. Open plots of land for the use of women to ease themselves are no more available in urban centres and even in the villages now.

10.26. The system of bucket privies for the disposal of night-soil in urban areas is nasty and hazardous to health.

10.27. Due to bad condition of the roads, they find it easier to carry the night-soil on the head rather than push the trolley. The containers of bucket privies also develop holes, so the night soil gets scattered around the dwelling houses and creates a problem both for the dwellers and cleaners.

10.28. The Commission recommends:

1. Simple, suitable toilet facilities should be provided in every village and urban slum. Common toilet facilities near their place of work and public places like markets should also be provided.

**2. Looking at the conditions of water, cement and other resources, we recommend low-cost circular 2-pit water seal latrine to be provided for each family, in their house on loan-cum-subsidy basis. We learn from experts that the cost of community or private latrines comes to the same.**

**3. The local Mahila Mandals should be entrusted with the entire programme. The Mahila Mandal should identify the homes, receive funds, manage the material needed for the latrine like footrests, platform, drain, pits, keep maintenance, train the women technicians, motivate local women and men, hold awareness camps in the beginning and occasionally. The displaced Scavenger women can be rehabilitated in production of the sanitary wares, soap and maintenance.**

4. The Government should provide for the assets, maintenance and training. It is learnt that the cost of two pit water-seal latrine is about 500/- (Sulabh Shachalaya model or some such suitable model) consumes space of 7'x4'x5' (depth) and needs little water.

5. The human waste thus accumulated can be utilised for fuel through bio-gas plant, to



be managed by Mahila Mandals.

6. All the housing schemes provided for the poor by the Government should have low-cost latrines.

## Administrative Machinery

11.1. Although at the planning level, there is consciousness about women's low status and the need to focus on women's needs in development, but at the implementation level, this awareness percolates very slowly. The delivery system is based on a stereotyped concept of women's development where women are objects of pity or welfare and are given some benefits in a sporadic and haphazard manner. In their urgency to meet their targets, the developmental agencies are not enough concerned whether there is an adequate coverage of women or not. In fixing targets, there is generally no consideration of women as a separate disadvantageous group. The implementation machinery is largely insensitive to the basic needs of women in poverty. The experience of IRDP where there is a constant pressure from the centre to fulfill the 30% target of women beneficiaries, has been though slow but positive and encouraging.

11.2. Under the headings of Planning, Monitoring and Training, suggestions have been made on how to improve the functioning of the administrative system vis-a-vis women in poverty. Apart from the straight line, bureaucratic channels of Government, Ministries and Departments at the State Level, the Commission recommends **active involvement of State Social Welfare Advisory Boards and State Women's Development Corporations in reaching out to the poor women.**

11.3. From its studies, the Commission has reached the conclusion that there should be an infrastructure in every State for helping women in economic ventures. Although a new infrastructure may be desirable, the Commission would not like to recommend a proposal which would lead to infructuous expenditures. The Commission, therefore, would like to recommend that the existing State Advisory Boards should be strengthened. They have a great potential for helping the rural poor women in the informal sector. However, the functioning of the State Advisory Boards at present is not quite effective. Programmes are added without corresponding increase in the manpower. Hence, if women's programmes are to be undertaken, they need manpower support and preparatory training as well as access to consultancy. There is limited delegation of powers, at times delays of 9 to 12 months take place for sanctioning of grants. The Board's procedure for sanctioning of loans needs to be reassessed and they should be revitalised to help women in poverty. In addition, adequate linkages with the State Government need to be built up. They should also promote starting of more voluntary agencies. When the Board was constituted in 1953, in the initial years it assisted around 3000 voluntary agencies and in 1988 it assists approx. 10,000 voluntary agencies. Since the voluntary agencies work far and in between, and not always in the interior, it is necessary that the number of such agencies should be expanded, to reach out a large number of rural poor women at a faster rate. However, a cautious approach should be adopted so that there is no mushroom growth of bogus organizations which exist only on paper. Apart from social workers, the State Advisory Boards should have more professional expertise available in marketing, project formulation and training as these should be important functions of the Board to assist poor women and help in the growth of Women's organisations.

11.4. The State Advisory Boards should also have more active links with the banking institutions. One of the bottlenecks which poor women are faced with is coping with the banking procedures and this work could be tackled by the State Advisory Boards who can act as

effective go-between to get loans to poor women. At present, there are programmes in the State Advisory Boards in which there is a tie up of the components of loan and subsidy that needs to be more effective. The constraints should be studied and removed, and the programmes be redesigned more realistically.

11.5. During its tours, the Commission was able to study the work of the Departments of Social Welfare and Women's Development Corporations in the States. The Commission is of the opinion that the Women's Development Corporations have a better potential to reach out to the poor women in a more effective way than the State Departments. However, these Development Corporations are only in five states, so far, and have their limitations in terms of resources and the context in which they work. Their approach in certain cases is restricted only to a few activities like grant of loan or subsidy. Some of the Corporations, with the assistance of NORAD, a Central scheme, have set up some production units. **The Commission feels that such Corporation should be set up in every State. The terms of reference should be expanded and they should play an effective promotional role emphasising on poor women.** The poor women, who come under our purview for generations have known only employer and employee relationship, they are not familiar with the concept of entrepreneurship cooperatives, and credit institutions. The Corporations should take care of these needs and also perform on their behalf feasibility and marketing studies so that activities which have a market are promoted. In other cases, the same activity having less demand can be promoted with better designing to capture new markets. Still in other cases, the activities which have no possibility of getting a market need to be discouraged and women motivated to start new activities.

11.6. The National Commission has observed that, under various developmental schemes, there is variation in the component of loans and subsidies. Similarly, the quantum of stipend also differs as also the training programmes, leading to imbalances. For instance, programmes which will not be very viable and useful tend to get more response because of the quantum of stipend being paid. Therefore, the matter of standardisation of the stipend needs to be undertaken.

11.7. In the development programmes, specially anti-poverty programmes, although care is taken to identify the beneficiaries the Commission has observed that single women and women headed households, get left out and the poorest of the poor at times are not selected. **For identification of women beneficiaries, mahila mandals and women's organisations may be actively associated.**

11.8. At the field level, where there should be convergence of services, however different Departments tend to work in a compartmentalised manner. It is recommended that **field functionaries should be imparted information, regarding programmes of the related Departments. This is necessary as women in poverty are normally involved in more than one activity and if one functionary reaches them, he or she should be able to impart information on other activities as well.**

11.9. The Commission is of the opinion that women workers are in a better position to reach out to women and have a greater understanding of women's problems. It is, therefore, recommended that in all Departments, there should be at least 30 per cent women workers. This should include Departments like Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forestry, Labour, Excise and Taxation and Industry.

11.10. Women's representation should be in all decision making levels, right from the lowest rung of the hierarchy to the highest. The decision making bodies may be government or local bodies like panchayats or municipalities.

11.11. The National Commission has observed that, inspite of special programmes for

SC/ST, the women in these groups lag far behind than men in taking advantage of such programmes. The Scheduled Caste Corporations in the State Governments also have not been laying emphasis on the coverage of women. Even in the Tribal Plans and the SC Component Plan, separate targets for women should be fixed.

11.12. The plight of poor women amongst the minorities is even more pitiable. Their problem is poverty and isolation. The levels of literacy and health are poor. The Muslim women in particular are more confined within their home situated in high density areas. The artisans and home based producers cannot venture to get out of their homes because of purdah and social inhibitions. The entire marketing of the products produced by them is done by the menfolk, the result being that the cash does not flow into their women's hands. The Commission strongly recommends that **the needs and interests of poor women among the minorities should be reflected in the Plan allocations and channeling of resources including the State Minority Boards. With spread of education, Muslim women are becoming keener to avail of the new opportunities. Therefore, special efforts should be made to bring them into the mainstream with other women, such as through, planning common worksheds and community centres and enrolling their membership in women's groups. This is the surest way of increasing communal integration.**

11.13. Similarly, women in **the North-Eastern States deserve special attention.** They tend to remain outside the national mainstream. Communication facilities are very poor. Prevalence of higher levels of alcoholism and use of drugs by the men has led to further deterioration in the economic status of the family besides causing mental tension to women. **Special steps should be taken to check alcoholism and the use of drugs.** Women of this region face the additional problem of harassment from the armed personnel patrolling certain areas. Further, the benefits of the Central Schemes, and the Centrally Sponsored Schemes, do not percolate down to the far flung areas of the country. At times, even Government orders/circulars do not reach the sub-divisional levels. The Commission recommends that it is not enough to give plan allocations to these States, but also ensure their proper utilisation. There should be better communication between the Centre and the States Governments. Monitoring and evaluation of programmes under Central and Centrally Sponsored Schemes should be made more effective.

11.14. The Commission recommends that all poor women should be safeguarded by conscious and deliberate policy against exploitation by the middlemen and harassment from petty officialdom like the inspectors, police, municipal authorities and other local bodies.\*

11.15. Fair price shops should be well stocked. The poor women do not get all the items due to them as per the ration cards. A matter for greater concern and worry is that poor women, specially seasonal and migratory labour, do not get even the ration cards. They have to make purchase of essential commodities at open market rates which they can ill afford. The Commission recommends effective implementation and supervision of the distribution system of essential commodities. It also recommends that Janta sarees should be available at all fair price shops. **Each woman should be entitled to two Janta sarees annually at controlled rates.** This will be a great relief to the poor women who normally have to spend about Rs. 50/- for one saree and blouse, which at controlled rates will be available for Rs. 13 to 15. In all consumer cooperatives running fair price shops, the women should constitute 50 per cent of membership.

11.16. The Commission recognises the negative impact of the attitude of the petty police officials in relation to the poor women's working conditions. The Commission would, however, like to mention that the poor women specially adivasi and harijan women, need to be protected from the atrocities of the police. Although, at the higher levels, there are indications

of a sympathetic attitude towards women, by and large, the attitude of the police is unsympathetic. When police joins hands with the local thugs, then there is no end to the harassment faced by the poor women. The Commission recommends that the police being an important arm of the administration should function as an instrument of development. They should protect the poor vulnerable women from exploitative elements. Special measures should be taken up for sensitisation of police to women's issues, and their problems. This may be done through periodical training programmes, giving awards and increasing the number of women personnel at the lower and middle levels.

11.17. The Commission recognises that the administrative machinery has an important role to play in alleviating the condition of the poor, specially women. It recommends that the **administrative machinery needs to be entrusted with values of integrity, honesty and concern for the poor.** This may be done through periodic refresher courses and also by developing mechanisms by which officers at all levels should be entrusted for a sufficient length of time, with the responsibility of planning and implementation of projects for the poor.

## Political and Social Will

12.1. From the study of the existing systems, the prevailing social attitudes and cultural ethos, the National Commission has come to the conclusion that **the presence or absence of a political will is a very crucial factor in determining the success or failure of a programme.** Where anti-women traditions are perpetuated, and the various mechanisms, specially the delivery mechanism, is consciously and unconsciously working against women, the presence of a strong political will, perhaps, become the single most important factor to bring about a change in the status of unprotected labouring women.

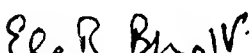
12.2. Ideally, the social will for changing women's status should proceed the political will. However, in a situation where a vast majority of women working in the informal, unorganized and self-employed sectors is concerned, live a life of deprivation and exploitation, the creation of a strong social will by a minority of people does not seem to be likely. It will take a long time for women to develop the power to resist exploitation and organize themselves for this purpose.

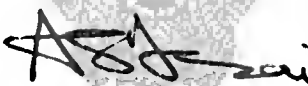
12.3. In such a situation, the role of political leadership is very crucial. It should not reflect an elitist image but should crusade for the majority, who are the exploited, and who have voted them into power. This is specially necessary when women's own representation in the political system is very low. In the General Elections of 1984, there were 59 per cent of women voters as against 68 per cent men. As women do not constitute a lobby, the political parties have neither utilised the lobby nor included them in their manifestation, as they go to the other minority/backward groups. They leave the men to influence the women. All political parties are guilty of not seriously tackling the women's issues and taking them up in their party manifestoes. All political parties appear reluctant to field women candidates. If the political leadership decides that women's problems have to be tackled on a priority basis, the entire planning processes, implementing mechanisms and monitoring system will be geared in no time. The National Commission, therefore, **places major responsibility on the political leadership for improving the status of the unprotected women and giving them political visibility which is lacking at present.**

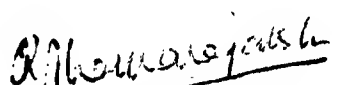
12.4. The implications of a strong political will are that it will have a direct effect on the planning process and on the system of implementation. The Government, machinery through which development resources are channelised, has proved to be often indifferent and ineffective in reaching the poor labouring women. And for this, the responsibility has to be shared between the political and administrative leadership.


12.5. Since women in poverty are victims of the existing social systems, attitudes and prejudices, one of the factors which can bring an improvement in the status, is the creation of the social will. Social will has to be created in the community, a work which has been started by voluntary action but needs to be accelerated by efforts of the Government through the instruments of education, communication and research. The measures have already been suggested under the appropriate headings mentioned above. The responsibility of the society in this context cannot be underrated. If the society and women themselves, do not become aware and act as watchdogs of their rights, guaranteed in the Constitution and various legislation, they cannot legitimately expect the existing systems, which tend to favour the vested interest, to benefit them. **Women's organization have the responsibility of acting as pressure groups on the system and also becoming repositories through which development resources can be channelized.**

12.6. There is another type of gap which is existing between women with resources and women without resources. **Women who have skills of education, knowledge, and leadership, and are entrepreneurs and professionals, should assist their impoverished sisters in articulating their demands, bring them into greater visibility, and help them to resist exploitation and to rise above the present status of poverty and deprivation.** It is only when women can get together as a homogenous group, irrespective of caste, class, community and activity differences, will their collective voice be heard and yield results.


  
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सत्यमेव जयते

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2. Smt. Pupul Jaykar, Adviser to the Prime Minister.
3. Women Members of Parliament.
4. Smt. Kumudben Joshi, Governor, Andhra Pradesh.
5. Shri Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister, West Bengal.
6. Begum S.M. Abdullah.
7. State Ministers of Women's Departments and other related Departments.
8. Secretaries in the Government of India, holding charge of the Departments of Women and Child Development, Rural Development and Education, and the Ministry of Education.
9. Chairman and Members of the State Advisory Boards.
10. Chairman/Managing Directors of Women Development Corporations.
11. State Labour Commissioners.
12. Central Trade Union Leaders.
13. Representatives of Voluntary Agencies.
14. Managing Directors of Forest Development Corporations.
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## APPENDIX I

# APPENDICES

### Note of Dissent

From  
Ms. Jaya Arunachalam,  
President,  
Working Women's Forum (India)

15.06.88

With reference to my signing the final report of the Self Employed Women Commission, I would like to draw the attention on the following facts before I sign the report.

1. At the outset, the report has not been written with professional competence condensing all the details collected in the form of a regular report. One can call this effort only a collection of materials and not an official report.

2. The name of the Commission is 'National Commission on Self Employed Women', but most of the collected information deals with working conditions on women workers in the unprotected labour sector. Therefore calling it a 'National Commission on Self-Employed', does give only a segment approach and not a sectoral approach to a report that would cover the entire informal sector. Therefore a change of name at least to the final report is an indispensable factor since otherwise it would be misleading to call this report as a report on the Self Employed Women.

3. Most of the details found in this are already covered in the National Perspective Plan for Women, which is now being processed in the Ministry of Women and Children. Therefore, it is a repetition of what is being done and one wonders whether such a replication like this is necessary at all on such a huge cost.

4. Any Commission for that matter appointed by the Government goes into details of any sector as a fact-finding team, trying to study the ways and means to improve the living/working conditions of the women workers. On the contrary, there are very little suggestions, but most of it is presumably materials collected against the Government's working into those areas. One should know all such inequalities do remain and the government having known such things has appointed this commission to suggest to improve situation after the collection of facts. In this connection the Member Secretary should have put in more work being a government representative.

5. It has not been placed before the various expert groups though two or three commission members met one or two parliamentarians, one or two Secretaries of the Govt. and one or two ministers. It has not gone before many other interested groups. Especially this report being on women workers of unprotected labour sector should have gone before trade unions in a big way as it is the body that is not interested in allowing the women workers to get organised.

Talking of widow pension, support for destitute women, prostitution and devadasi, drugs and alcoholism are already spoken of in the perspective plan for women. These are pertaining to women and children in general. Therefore the function of this report is to draw the attention of connected authorities on women labour



Taking into consideration the hurried method of preparing a report like this, one wouldn't like to be a party to such hasty procedures. Therefore I venture to write this dissent note from my side.

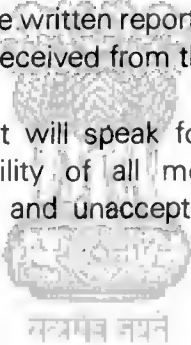
Besides, I would appreciate if some information is given as to what has happened to the video material for which, I understand and presume, over 20 lakhs have been spent and who will be owner of the material? Is it the Government or what does the Commission proposed to do with this material?

I place my dissent note on the report of the Commission.

[Response: It was not possible for the member to attend the meetings of the National Commission or the Task Force on Legislative Protection of which she was a member, nor did she attend the the meeting of the National Commission with the Members of the Drafting Committee. She was also unable to join the Commission in its meetings with the cross section of people including experts, individuals and trade unions. The member was able to attend only two meetings in the beginning and joined the Commission only on one tour and that too not complete of one State viz. Tamilnadu. For this reason, the member is unaware of the total efforts gone into the preparations of the report, of the outcome of various meetings of the Commission, and also about the title of the report and the cost of video report which is Rs. 3.66 lakhs. The video report is part of the written report being presented by the Commission to the Government. No comments were received from the member on the drafts todate except the dissent note.

About the quality of the report, it will speak for itself.

The report is a joint responsibility of all members, passing aspersions on one Member-Secretary is unfair, unethical and unacceptable. [Ela R. Bhatt.]



## APPENDIX II

Mo. F. 9-110/85-WW.  
Government of India  
Ministry of Human Resource Development  
Department of Women & Child Development

Shastri Bhavan,  
New Delhi.

Dated: 5 January, 1987

### NOTIFICATION

Despite the existence of various Constitutional and legal provisions safeguarding women's employment a large number of women workers particularly in the unorganised sector suffer from various disadvantages relating to their working lives as well as in their homes. The coverage of labour laws has not benefitted these women workers in many crucial areas especially health, maternity and social security. With the changing social and economic conditions, women's productive roles have assumed new significance but without back-up support and services a healthy combination of women's productive and re-productive roles cannot be sustained.

2. Government of India feel that it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive examination and study of self-employed women workers, as it is in the area that the lack of access to credit marketing, health and social security are most discernible. It has therefore been decided to constitute a Commission on Self-Employed women with the following terms of reference:-

- i) To examine the present status of women in the Self-Employed Sector with special reference to employment health, education and social status.
- ii) To assess the impact of various labour legislation on the self-employed—specially in respect of maternity benefits, health insurance, etc.
- iii) To identify the constraints on increase of productivity of self-employed women and the gaps in training, credit, upgradation of skills, marketing, etc.
- iv) To survey employment patterns, including production relations and assess their impact on the wages of the self-employed women.
- v) To undertake a survey of the effects of macro policies relating to investment, production, technology, etc. on the status of self-employed women.
- vi) To consider the link between the productive and re-productive roles of the self-employed women, with special reference to their health status.
- vii) To suggest measures relating to all sectors for removing the constraints which adversely effect the integration of self-employed women in the national development process.

3. The Chairperson and the Members of the Commission will be as under:-

1. Smt. Ela Bhatt (M.P.)	Chairperson
2. Smt. Arathy Desai	Member
3. Dr. Thamarajakshi	Member
4. Smt. Mrinal Pande	Member
5. Smt. Jaya Arunachalam	Member
6. Dr. Vina Mazumdar	Member

4. The Commission will regulate its own procedures and visit or depute one or more of its members to visit such part of the country as it considers necessary.

5. The Headquarter of the Commission will be New Delhi. Non-official members will be entitled to TAVDL.

6. The Commission will submit its report within a period of one year.

Sd/-  
(VEENA KOHLI)  
Director (WD)

No. 9-110/85 WW  
Government of India.  
Ministry of Human Resource Development  
Department of Women and Child Development

Shastri Bhavan,  
New Delhi.

Dated: the 1st April 1987

नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय  
N O T I F I C A T I O N

In partial modification of paragraph 2 of this Ministry's notification No. F. 9-110/85 WW dated the 5th January, 1987 setting up a Commission on Self-Employed Women, the following paragraph is to be added to the notification numbered as para 2A:-

2A The above terms of reference of the Commission would also cover all unprotected women labour in the country and extend to women in the informal sector.

Sd/-  
(P.S. RAVINDRA)

Under Secretary to the Government of India.

No. F. 9-110/86- WW  
Government of India  
Ministry of Human Resource Development  
Department of Women & Child Development

Shastri Bhavan,  
New Delhi.

Dated: 1st September, 1987

N O T I F I C A T I O N

In continuation of the notification of even number dated the 5th January, 1987 setting up the National Commission on Self-Employed women, the Government of India is pleased to accept the resignation of Dr. Vina Mazumdar from the Membership of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women vide her letter dated 24th June, 1987.

2. The Government of India is also pleased to re-designate Km. Veena Kohli, Secretary, National Commission on Self-Employed Women as Member-Secretary of the Commission.

Sd/-  
(P.S. RAVINDRA)  
Under Secretary

No. 9-110/85- WW (Vol. II)  
Government of India  
Ministry of Human Resource Development  
Department of Women & Child Development



Shastri Bhavan,  
New Delhi.

Dated: the 11th Feb, 1987

N O T I F I C A T I O N

In continuation of this Department's Notification of even number dated the 5th January, 1987, the Government of India have decided to extend the term of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women for a period from the 5th January, 1988 to the 4th July, 1988 to enable it to finalise its report according to the terms laid down in the Notification Nos. F. 9-110/85-WW dated the 5th January, 1987 and the 1st April, 1987.

Sd/-  
(P.S. RAVINDRA)  
Under Secretary to the Government of India.

No. 9-110/85-WW. (Pt.)  
Government of India  
Department of Women & Child Development  
New Delhi-110001.

Dated: 17 February, 1987

Subject:— Constitution of Task Forces by the National Commission on Self-Employed Women.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women has been constituted to conduct a comprehensive examination and study on self-employed women workers. The Commission will focus on the entire group of unprotected women labour in the poverty sector. To assist its working, the Commission has constituted a Task Force on Impact of Macro-Policies. The following members will constitute the Task Force:—

- |                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| 1. Dr. Vina Mazumdar       | — Convenor |
| 2. Ms. Nirmala Banerjee    | — Member   |
| 3. Ms Maithreyi Krishnaraj | — Member   |
| 4. Ms. U. Kalpagam         | — Member   |
| 5. Ms. Usha Jumani         | — Member   |
| 6. Ms. Kumud Sharma        | — Member   |
| 7. Dr. R. Thamarajakshi    | — Member   |

2. The Task Force will look into the following areas:—

- (a) To review the impact of various macro policies and developmental strategies in different sectors on the status of women in the target group.
- (b) To examine the role of specialised development agencies and of agencies of Government in arresting/accelerating such impact.
- (c) To examine the role of concepts and definitions adopted by various official data collecting agencies.
- (d) To suggest measures to improve these roles and recommend alternate strategies.

3. While addressing itself to the above areas, the task Force should keep in view the following objectives:—

- (i) To bring into visibility unprotected labouring women, focusing on the poverty sector to which the large majority belong.
- (ii) To bring out the contribution of the target group of women as mentioned at (i) above to the family economy and national economy.
- (iii) To identify and examine the successful methodologies in organisation of the unorganised women labour.

4. The Task Force may make use of any existing studies, take assistance from any educational, research, social and other institutions. It may carry out field visits, if necessary. The Task Force is required to give its preliminary report and discuss it with the Commission by the end of June 1987.
5. The Members of the Task Force will be paid TA/DA as per Government Rules. The Task Force is also required to submit its budget, if any, for commissioning studies, research etc.

Sd/-  
(VEENA KOHLI)  
Director

No. 9-110/85-WW. (Pt.)  
Government of India  
Department of Women & Child Development  
New Delhi-110001.

Dated: 26 February, 1987

Subject:— Constitution of Task Forces by the National Commission on Self-Employed Women.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women has been constituted to conduct a comprehensive examination and study on self-employed women workers. The Commission will focus on the entire group of unprotected women labour in the poverty sector. To assist its working, the Commission has constituted a Task Force on Legislative Protection. The following members will constitute the Task Force:—

- |                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| 1. Shri T.S. Shankaran     | — Convenor |
| 2. Ms. Renana Jhabvala     | — Member   |
| 3. Ms. Geetha Ramakrishnan | — Member   |
| 4. Ms. Kirti Singh         | — Member   |
| 5. Ms. Meena Gupta         | — Member   |
| 6. Ms. Jaya Arunachalam    | — Member   |

2. The Task Force will look into the following areas:—
  - (i) To review existing legislation and their applicability to women workers in the target group;
  - (ii) To review effectiveness of enforcement systems and identify causes of their failure to protect these groups;
  - (iii) To recommend measures for amendment or the need for new legislation;

- (iv) Measures for creating greater awareness and effectiveness of these laws; and
  - (v) Identify methods for organising which will prove effective for enforcement of laws.
3. While addressing itself to the above areas, the Task Force should keep in view the following objectives:—
- (i) To bring into visibility unprotected labouring women, focusing on the poverty sector to which the large majority belong.
  - (ii) To bring out the contribution of the target group of women as mentioned at (i) above to the family economy and national economy.
  - (iii) To identify and examine the successful methodologies in organisation of the unorganised women labour.
4. The Task Force may make use of any existing studies, take assistance from any educational, research, social and other institutions. It may carry out field visits, if necessary. The Task Force is required to give its preliminary report and discuss it with the Commission by the end of June 1987.
5. The Members of the Task Force will be paid TA/DA as per Government Rules. The Task Force is also required to submit its budget, if any, for commissioning studies, research etc.



Sd/-  
(VEENA KOHLI)

No. 9-110/85-WW. (Pt.)  
Government of India  
Department of Women & Child Development  
New Delhi-110001.

Dated: 17 February, 1987

Subject:— Constitution of Task Forces by the National Commission on Self-Employed Women.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women has been constituted to conduct a comprehensive examination and study on self-employed women workers. The Commission will focus on the entire group of unprotected women labour in the poverty sector. To assist its working, the Commission has constituted a Task Force on Health Aspects. The following members will constitute the Task Force:—

1. Dr. A. Desai	— Convenor
2. Dr. Saroj Jha	— Co-Convenor
3. Dr. Kashyap	— Member
4. Ms. Srilata Batliwala.	— Member
5. Dr. Rani Bang.	— Member
6. Ms. Veena Shatrughna	Member
7. Ms. Manisha Gupte.	— Member
8. Ms. Meerai Chatterjee	— Member

The Task Force will look into the following areas:—

- (a) To review and gather information on the inter-relationship between the health status/problems of these women and their work status/productivity/earnings;
  - (b) Identify occupational health hazards, and area specific diseases that affect them;
  - (c) Examine the inter-relationship between maternity, nutrition and earning capacity;
  - (d) To examine their access to health care, maternity protection and public and preventive health services and the role of time and money in failure to obtain such access;
  - (e) To examine women's awareness/knowledge in health related issues and the cultural aspects that affect such awareness/access to such knowledge; and
  - (f) To recommend measures for improvement in all these.
3. While addressing itself to the above areas, the Task Force should keep in view the following objectives:—
- (i) To bring into visibility unprotected labouring women, focusing on the poverty sector to which the large majority belong.
  - (ii) To bring out the contribution of the target group of women as mentioned at (i) above to the family economy and national economy.
  - (iii) To identify and examine the successful methodologies in organisation of the unorganised women labour.
4. The Task Force may make use of any existing studies, take assistance from any educational, research, social and other institutions. It may carry out field visits, if necessary. The Task Force is required to give its preliminary report and discuss it with the Commission by the end of June 1987.
5. The Members of the Task Force will be paid TA/DA as per Government Rules. The Task Force is also required to submit its budget, if any, for commissioning studies, research etc.

Sd/-  
(VEENA KOHLI)  
Director



No. 9-110/85-WW. (Pt.)  
Government of India  
Department of Women & Child Development  
New Delhi-110001.

Dated: 17 February, 1987

Subject:— Constitution of Task Forces by the National Commission on Self-Employed Women.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women has been constituted to conduct a comprehensive examination and study on self-employed women workers. The Commission will focus on the entire group of unprotected women labour in the poverty sector. To assist its working, the Commission has constituted a Task Force on Communication Net-work systems. The following members will constitute the Task Force:—

- |                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| 1. Dr. Neeraben Desai   | — Convenor |
| 2. Dr. Anite Dighe      | — Member   |
| 3. Mrs Nalini Singh     | — Member   |
| 4. Mrs. Mrinal Pande    | — Member   |
| 5. Ms. Usha Rai         | — Member   |
| 6. Ms. Sarojini Bisaria | — Member   |
| 7. Ms. Jai Chandiram    | — Member   |
| 8. Dr. Shahla Haidar    | — Member   |

2. The Task Force will look into the following areas:—

- (a) To identify the existing local communication channels and suggest how they could be effectively used for information flow of their legal rights, specific information to improve the economic, health, educational and social status and information regarding development programmes and resources available for women's development.
- (b) Identify the areas in which there are distortions of the images and values affecting the visibility and the potential power for development of women carried out by the mass communication.
- (c) To suggest methodologies for flow of information from the grassroots and media. To policy makers, implementation agency and to public creating awareness and mobilising support.

3. While addressing itself to the above areas, the task Force should keep in view the following objectives:—

- (i) To bring into visibility unprotected labouring women, focusing on the poverty sector to which the large majority belong.
- (ii) To bring out the contribution of the target group of women as mentioned at (i) above to the family economy and national economy.
- (iii) To identify and examine the successful methodologies in organisation of the unorganised women labour.

4. The Task Force may make use of any existing studies, take assistance from any educational, research, social and other institutions. It may carry out field visits, if necessary. The Task Force is required to give its preliminary report and discuss it with the Commission by the end of June 1987.
5. The Members of the Task Force will be paid TA/DA as per Government Rules. The Task Force is also required to submit its budget, if any, for commissioning studies, research etc.

Sd/-  
(VEENA KOHLI)  
Director

No. 11-5/87-WW (N.C.)  
Government of India  
Department of Women & Child Development  
New Delhi-110001.

Dated: 30 April, 1987

Subject:— Constitution of Task Forces by the National Commission on Self-Employed Women.

The National Commission on Self-Employed Women has been constituted to conduct a comprehensive examination and study on self-employed women workers. The Commission will focus on the entire group of unprotected women labour in the poverty sector. To assist its working, the Commission has constituted a Task Force on Workers. The following members will constitute the Task Force:—

- |                           |   |          |
|---------------------------|---|----------|
| 1. Miss L. Lakshmi        | — | Convenor |
| 2. Mrs. Chand Bibi        | — | Member   |
| 3. Mrs. Dhanama Dhanapal  | — | Member   |
| 4. Mrs. Urmila Haldankar  | — | Member   |
| 5. Mrs. Bari Soren        | — | Member   |
| 6. Mrs. Chandaben Jagaria | — | Member   |

2. The Task Force will look into the following areas:—

- (a) To assess the problems faced by women workers in the poverty sector.
- (b) To study the areas of exploitation faced by labouring women.
- (c) Experiences in organising women workers.
- (d) Suggestions for improving the working conditions of the labouring women.
- (e) Suggestions for organising women to fight for their rights.

3. While addressing itself to the above areas, the Task Force should keep in view the following objectives:—
- (i) To bring into visibility unprotected labouring women, focusing on the poverty sector to which the large majority belong.
  - (ii) To bring out the contribution of the target group of women as mentioned at (i) above to the family economy and national economy.
  - (iii) To identify and examine the successful methodologies in organisation of the unorganised women labour.
4. The Task Force may make use of any existing studies, take assistance from any educational, research, social and other institutions. It may carry out field visits, if necessary. The Task Force is required to give its preliminary report and discuss it with the Commission by the end of June 1987.
5. The Members of the Task Force will be paid TA/DA as per Government Rules.

(Sd/-  
(VEENA KOHLI)  
Director



## APPENDIX IV

### DRAFTING COMMITTEE

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Smt. Ela R. Bhatt.   | Chairperson   |
| 2. Dr. Armaity S. Desai | Convenor, Task Force on Health                            |
| 3. Dr. Neera Desai      | Convenor, Task Force on Communication<br>Net Work Systems |
| 4. Mr. T.S. Shankaran   | Convenor, Task Force on Legislative Protection            |
| 5. Dr. Nirmala Banerjee | Member, Task Force on Impact of Macro Policies            |
| 6. Km. Veena Kohli      | Member Secretary  |



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## APPENDIX V

### APPEAL

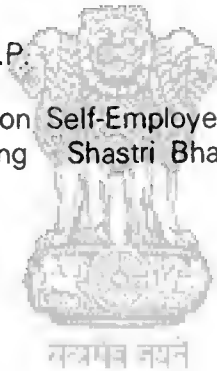
The overwhelming majority of women workers in our country have continued to labour for their livelihood and the survival of their families without legislative protection, maternity benefits or other essential security which are their due, not even acknowledging their status as workers and contributors to the national economy. The Government of India has now constituted a National Commission to investigate the situation, problems and needs of this most exploited and vulnerable group of women workers.

We appeal to all citizens, social organisations, educational/research institutions, media groups etc. who share our concern to assist our work:

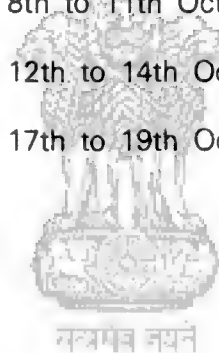
- a. by sending any information/studies/papers on any group of such women that they are aware of;
- b. by volunteering to generate/gather such information in definite regions/areas; and
- c. by reaching to as many women in this class as they can the information that such an enquiry has been initiated, so that they come forward to articulate their problems and participate in the search for adequate solutions.

All communications may be sent to:

Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, M.P.  
Chairperson  
National Commission on Self-Employed Women  
Room No. 845, A Wing Shastri Bhavan  
New Delhi.



7. Madhya Pradesh	17th to 20th July 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Dr. Armaity Desai
8. Gujarat	27 to 31st July 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Mrs. Mrinal Pande, Dr. Armaity Desai
9. Kerala	6th to 9th August 1987	Miss. Ela R. Bhatt, Dr. Armaity Desai
10. Andhra Pradesh	21st to 23rd August 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Mrs. Mrinal Pande
11. Karnataka	24th to 26th August 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Mrs. Mrinal Pande
12. Orissa	6th to 9th August 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Dr. Armaity Desai
13. West Bengal	10th to 14th Sept. 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Mrs. Mrinal Pande
14. Bihar	15 to 16th Sept. 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Mrs. Mrinal Pande
15. Uttar Pradesh	8th to 11th Oct. 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Mrs. Mrinal Pande
16. Punjab	12th to 14th Oct. 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli
17. Tamil Nadu	17th to 19th Oct. 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Dr. R. Thamarajakshi, Mrs. Jaya Arunachalam



## APPENDIX VI

### Tour Intinerary of the National Commission

State	Date and Months	Name of the Members
1. Himachal Pradesh	8th to 13th April 1987	Ms. Ela R. Bhatt, Ms. Veena Kohli, Ms. Vina Mazumdar, Dr. Mrinal Pande
2. Assam Nagaland and Manipur	24th to 30th April 1987	Ms. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Dr. Vina Mazumdar
3. Andaman & Nicobar Islands	17th to 20th April 1987	Mrs. Ela R Bhatt
4. Maharashtra	9th to 12th May 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Miss Veena Kohli, Mrs, Mrinal Pande, Dr. R. Thamarajakshi, Dr. Vina Mazumdar
5. Jammu and Kashmir	7th-11th June 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Dr. Armaity Desai, Mrs. Mrinal Pande
6. Rajasthan	1st to 4th July 1987	Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, Dr. Armaity Desai, Mrs. Mrinal Pande



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## APPENDIX VII

### Meetings of the National Commission

A total of 14 meetings of the National Commission were held:

1. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women held on 3rd February 1987.
2. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with Task Forces, held on 14th and 15th March 1987.
3. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with Workers Task Force held on 13th May 1987.
4. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women held on 19th and 20th June 1987.
5. Second Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with Workers Task Force, held on 21st July 1987.
6. Third Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with Workers Task Force, held on 21st September 1987.
7. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with Central Trade Unions, held on 6th October 1987.
8. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with various Women's Organizations, held on 7th October 1987.
9. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with Labour Commissioners, held on 15th October 1987.
10. Meeting of the National Commission on Self Employed Women with Task Force, held on 2nd and 3rd November 1987.





## APPENDIX VIII

### Review Papers/Studies commissioned by the National Commission

Study	Institute	Author
<b>Impact of Macro Policies</b>		
1. Women's in the Labour Force Analysis of NSS Data	Madras Institute of Development Studies	Dr. U. Kulpagam.
2. Some Recent Trends in the Economic Activities of Indian Women	Centre for Studies in Social Sciences	Dr. Nirmala Banerjee
3. Women Workers in the Construction Sector	Institute of Economic Growth	Mrs. Swapna Mukhopadhyaya
4. Women vendors in India's Urban Centres	National Institute of Urban Affairs	
5. Women and Urbanization		
6. Analysis of Institutional Funds Flow and its Effect on Women's Work	Self Employed Women's association	Ms. Usha Jumanani
7. Women Domestic Workers in India	National Institute of Public Cooperation & Child Development	Mrs. Soma Parthasarthy
8. National Policies for Natural Resources Management and Marginalization of Poor Rural Women	Centre for Women's Development Studies	Dr. Kumud Sharma
9. Impact of Macro Policy on the Employment in the Unorganized Sector in Mining Industry	MARG	Dr. Vasudha Dhagamwar
10. Impact of Anti-Poverty Programmes on Women	Gandhi Labour Institute	Dr. Indira Hirway
11. Analysis of Licensing Policy for the Use of Natural Resources of Land, and Forest its Effect on Women's Force	Self Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad	Ms. Usha Jhumani
12. Impact of Industrialization on Self Employed Women	Jawaharlal Nehru University	Prof. M.N. Panini

Study's	Institute	Authors
13. Headloaders in Railway Yards	Ahmedabad Women's Action Group	Dr. Ila Pathank
14. Handloom	Industrial Development Services	Mr L.C. Jain
15. Women and Crafts	Research Unit on Women's Studies, SNDT University	Dr. Maihey Krishna Raj
16. Child Care Services	Mobile Creches	Ms Mina Swaminathan
17. Housing and Unorganized Women		Ms Menaka Roy

## Legislative Protection

1. Labour Laws and Women Workers	National Labour Law Association	Shri S.C Gupta and Shri V.P. Gupta
2. Women Forest Workers	DISHA	Shri M.D. Mistry
3. Women and Cooperative Law	SAMAKHYA	Ms. Shashi Rajagopalan
4. Women Workers & Agriculture	—	Dr. Gail Omvedt
5. Women Workers & Agriculture	—	Ms. Gita Ramaswamy
6. Women Workers in Unorganized Manufacturing Sector	—	Ms. Rukhsana Choudhary
7. Women Fisheries Workers	P.C.O. Centre	Ms. Nalini Nayak
8. Municipal and Police Laws vis-a-vis Women Workers	—	Ms. Rani Advani
9. Women Workers in Railway Goodsheds and Transshipment Yards	Ahmedabad Women's Action Group	Ms. Ila Pathak
10. Home Based Workers		Ms. Indira Jai Singh
11. Construction Workers		Ms. Geetha Ramakrishnan Mr. Anjali Rage



## Health

1. Women's Work, Maternity and Access to Health Care—Socio-economic Study of Villages in Pune District	Foundation for Research in Community Health FRCH	Ms. Manisha Gupte Ms. Anita Borker
2. Women, Housing and Health—A Socio-economic Study of One Slum Settlement in Bombay	FRCH	Ms. Manisha Gupte
3. Health Status of Women Agricultural Workers—A Study of One village in Madhya Pradesh	Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres SPARC	Dr. Mona Saxena
4. Health of Women Working as	Ahmedabad Women's	Mrs. Ila Pathak

Study's	Institute	Author
Contract Labour in Railway Yards & Transshipment Points	Action Group	
5. Hospital Incidence of fracture Neck of Femur in relation to Women's Occupation and Social Status	National Institute on Nutrition	Dr. Veena Shatrughna
6. The Experience of Self-Employed Women with the Govt. Health Systems in the Rural Areas and Implications for Policy	National Institute on Nutrition	Dr. Veena Shatrughna
7. Occupational Health Problems of Agarbatti Women Workers	Self-Employed Women's Association	Ms Mirai Chatterjee
8. Occupational Health Problems of Masala Women Workers	Self-Employed Women's Association	Ms Mirai Chatterjee

### Communication Net Work System

1. Evaluation of Adult Education Primers from the view point of Self-Employed Women.	National Council on Education, Research & Training, (NCERT)	Dr. <b>Sarojini</b> Bisaria
2. The Visibility of Self Employed Women in Gujarati Text books.	Ahmedabad Women's Action Group	Dr. Ila Pathak and others
3. Role of Television in Projection of Life and Problems of the Self Employed Women	—	Binod C. Agarwal S.R. Joshi
4. Visibility of Working Women Under the Poverty line in television Programmes	—	Prabha Krishnan
5. A Survey of Information Needs of Women Workers in Unorganized Sector from Radio	—	Sjt. P.S. Murthi
6. Doordarshan and the Women of the Non-formal Sector—A Viewer's Study	—	Geeta Bakshi
7. Depiction in Hindi Films of Women in the Unorganized Sector	MANUSHI	Madhu Kishwar Ruth Vanita
8. Projection of Self Employed Women in Print Media—Hindi Journals	Member of the Commission	Mrinal prande
9. Projection of Self Employed Women in Print Media—Sunday Observer	—	Veena Poonacha
10. Projection of Self Employed Women in Print Media—Femina and Eve's Weekly	SNDT University	Saviya Viegas

11. Issues and Problems of Women—Some Reflections —Analysis of some of the Dissertations on Self Employed Women	Lady Irwin College New Delhi.	Dr. Anand Laxmi
12. Methods of Communication to Women in Unorganized Sector	—	Jay Gopal
13. Women Workers in the Kamdani Industry of Lucknow	Giri Institute for Hill Development, Lucknow	Pooja Jayal
14. Muslim Women in Informal Sector	—	Sumbul Rizvi
15. Patti Workers in Zohrabagh (Aligarh)	—	Jahanzeb Akhtar
16. Evaluation of Organizations working for the Target Groups —Annapurna	SNDT University	Savia Viegas
17. Study of Mobile Creches	SNDT University	Savia Viegas
18. Evaluation of Molkarin Sangathan, Pune	—	Savia Viegas
19. Use of Communication Media for Propagating Development Programmes among the Self Employed Women	—	S.C. Bhatia



## APPENDIX IX,

### NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN

#### Survey of Women Workers in Poverty— 1987

Recognising the paucity of basic information on the demographic, social and economic aspects of poor self-employed women, the Commission made an effort to generate some quick data in this regard. Accordingly, in consultation with experts, a questionnaire was devised to gather information on various aspects like age, work status, education, membership of different organisations, particulars of family members, their education, earnings, type of activities and nature of employment engaged in, problems faced by the poor working women in the course of their work and their perception of work. As many as ten lakh questionnaires were mailed to different States and Union Territories to gather the requisite information with the help of the Government, as well as voluntary agencies, social workers, activists, educational institutions and trade unions. The purpose was not to be confined within the laid down statistical parameters of research and formulate some generalisations but to reach out to as many poor working women as possible in a short span of two months or so, and supplement the efforts of the Members of the National Commission who had toured various States and Union Territories to get the first hand, on-the-spot information from the working women themselves. The Survey was, thus, one more effort to get some insight into the working and problems of poor women. The format of the questionnaire was purposely kept as simple as possible. A sample questionnaire, with an appeal and instructions for filling up the questionnaire is given at Annexe. I.

The questionnaires were filled in by various agencies on a purely voluntary basis. The postage was paid by the concerned agencies/individuals themselves. There are reports of where some illiterate individuals even paid money (Rupee one) for getting the questionnaire read out to them. It has doubtlessly, been an exemplary exercise. Within a short span of three months or so, the Commission received back as many as 1.5 lakh questionnaires. The promptness, and active cooperation and service rendered by various agencies and individuals in the country reflects their deep concern for the cause of unprotected labouring women. Needless to say, the method of filling up questionnaires and some interpretations and assumptions did differ. Nonetheless, the response was spontaneous and the reporting does mark the honest contribution of the activists, for presenting a true profile of the poor labouring women. This is evident from the primary analysis of the data. The data lend support and confirm the reality as witnessed by the Members of the Commission during their field visits and as recorded by the various researchers and activists. Some salient features emerging from the analysis of the data are as under follows:

*Average size of Family:* The average size of a family works out to be 5.3 persons comprising 2.6 males and 2.7 females.

*Sex Ratio:* The picture obtained in respect of sex ratio is very different than what is reported in the National Census and NSS. The overall sex ratio works out to be 1020 females per thousand males (1017 in rural areas and 1041 in urban areas. The proportion of females in the age group 18 and above is higher i.e. 55.6 per cent as against 51.4 per cent in the case of males. The results are rather different from the prevailing pictures by the Census or the NSS,

where the interviewing is done mainly by men. One of the unique features of the present survey has been that the interview work was almost wholly done with the help of female interviewers.

Table 1. Sex Ratio By Broad Age Group, 1987.  
(Females per 1000 males)

Age Group	Rural	Urban	Total
Above 18 Years	1100	1124	1104
Below 18 Years	928	957	932
Total	1017	1041	1020

Table 2. Distribution of Literates and Earners By Broad Age Groups, 1987

Age Group	Literacy Rate			% of Earners		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Below 18 Year						
Male	38.9	42.7	39.5	5.0	5.4	3.6
Female	31.9	36.4	33.0	5.5	6.1	6.9
Total	35.5	39.6	36.4	5.2	5.8	6.2
18 Years and Above						
Male	45.7	48.4	45.3	72.4	71.5	71.9
Female	29.7	35.4	29.9	64.1	65.0	65.1
Total	37.3	41.5	37.2	68.1	68.1	68.3
Total Population						
Male	42.4	45.5	42.5	40.1	38.9	39.7
Female	30.6	35.9	31.3	38.5	38.3	39.3
Total	36.5	40.6	36.8	39.3	38.6	39.5

\* Totals in all the tables include respondents who have not specified their rural-urban status.

*Literacy:* The overall literacy rate works out to be 36.8 per cent. The literacy rate amongst females is 31.3 per cent as against 42.5 per cent amongst males. The gender disparity in literacy rate in urban areas is somewhat less marked than in the rural areas. In rural areas, the female literacy rate works out to be 30.6 per cent as against 42.4 per cent amongst males. The sex ratio for literates in rural areas is 734.

*Workers:* The sex ratio among workers as per our survey turns out to be rather favorable i.e. 1009. This has to be interpreted with caution as it, by and large, probably represents the distress sale of labour compelled by the sheer urge to survive and manage a subsistence living.

Work force participation rates turn out to be highly depressed, i.e. 39.5 only. Even in the age group 18 and above, these are barely 68.3 per cent. The disparity in male and female work participation rates in both rural and urban areas is marginal as the work participation rates for females are almost the same as for males.

*Incidence of child labour* amongst females is much higher than in males. In the age group 18 years and below, the number of female earners is as high as 6.9 as against 3.6 per cent in the case of males. However, in the age group 18 years and above, the proportion of male earners is much higher i.e. 71.9 per cent as against female earners 65.1 per cent. Even amongst the respondents, it is significant to note that, as many as 3.1 per cent of female workers are below 15 years of age.

*Age specific distribution* of female workers (respondents) shows that the highest number of female workers are engaged in the reproductive age group of 25-34 years. The proportion of female workers to total workers increases from 14.2 per cent in the age group 15-24 years to 37.0 per cent in the age group 25-34 years and thereafter it records a steepfall for the subsequent age groups. The respective percentages for the age groups 35-44 and 45-54 years are 28.7 and 12.1 respectively. At the figures for all activity groups and nature of employment are similar. This is highly undesirable as women are at the peak of their work only for a period of 10 years i.e. the age group of 25-34 years. This is the age group, in which the burden of performing the reproductive functions is the highest and under normal conditions, women may like to devote themselves to look after the children rather than seeking employment. Thus, the process of aging, particular with reference to employment starts too early and grows too fast in the case of women.

Table 3. Distribution of Female Workers (Respondents) By Broad Age Group, 1987:-

Age Group	Rural	Urban	Total
Below 15	2.6	2.8	3.3
15-24	14.3	15.3	14.2
25-34	36.7	36.5	37.0
35-44	28.7	28.3	28.7
45-54	12.7	12.7	18.4
55-above	55.00	44.4	4.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Educational Levels of Workers:* The female workers are characterised by a very low level of education. On the whole, 61.6 per cent of female workers (respondents) were illiterate 12.5 per cent were literate but below primary school level 10.3 per cent were educated up to the primary level, 7.5 per cent were up to middle level and only 1.1 per cent were graduates and above.

Table 4. Distribution of Female Workers (Respondents) By Educational Level, 1987.

Educational Y Level	Rural	Urban	Total
Illiterate	62.7	55.2	61.6
Literate but below Primary	12.1	14.6	12.5
Primary but not middle	10.4	11.0	10.3
Middle but below high school	7.4	8.2	7.5
High school but below graduate	6.6	8.6	7.0
Graduate and above.	0.7	2.4	1.1

A study of occupation/employment status-wise distribution of female workers (respondents) by their educational level shows that the illiteracy rate is somewhat higher among the female workers engaged in construction work (83.3 per cent in rural areas and 81.5 per cent in urban areas), followed by those engaged in collection of goods like fuel and fodder (74.4 per cent), agriculture (72.8 per cent), vendors and hawkers (64.2 per cent). The incidence of illiteracy amongst rural female workers is far higher in rural areas than in the urban areas. Over all, literacy rate is the highest amongst those engaged in services (50.7 per cent), followed by those in crafts and manufacturing (47.7 per cent).

The incidence of illiteracy if analysed by the employment status of females, indicates that it is the highest among those who are working for exchange of goods and services in kind (71.9 per cent), followed by those working as wage labourers outside home (68.2 per cent), and unpaid family work (63.7 per cent). The female workers engaged on contract/piece-rate and paid work at home and independent work had better literacy rate (42.5 per cent and 41.7 per cent respectively and enjoyed relatively higher educational standard than others.

Table 5. Literacy Amongst Female Workers (Respondents) By Broad Activity Group and Number of Employment, 1987

Activity	Literacy Rate		
	Rural	Urban	Total
<i>Activity Group</i>			
Agriculture	26.4	34.6	27.2
Horticulture	50.9	42.9	46.9
Rearing Live-stock	38.9	47.6	37.5
Crafts (Processing & Manufacturing)	45.3	50.5	47.7
Collection of goods	21.7	27.7	23.6
Services	54.8	49.1	50.7
Vendors/hawkers	42.9	36.6	35.8
Construction workers	16.7	18.5	59.4
Total	37.3	44.8	38.4
<i>Nature of Employment</i>			
Unpaid family work	34.7	44.7	36.3
Wage labour outside home	28.2	40.3	31.8
Contact/Piece-rate/paid work at home	42.2	43.0	42.5
Independent work	43.0	48.0	41.7
Exchange of goods and services in kind	27.3	29.7	28.1
Total	37.3	44.8	38.4

**Activity Status:** The activity profile of poor female workers presents driving them to diverse occupations and various sub-activities within the same occupation. Even classified by broad occupational groups, on an average, a female worker is engaged in 1.73 activities or more. This proportion in rural areas is much higher i.e. 1.96 activities than in the urban areas, i.e., 1.45 activities.



A **percentage** distribution of activity responses show that the primary sector i.e. **agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry** put together account for **52.3 per cent** of **total** activities, followed by crafts (processing and manufacturing) accounting for 18.6 per cent and services accounting for (15.4 per cent).

Table 6. Percentage Distribution of Responses on Activity Status of Female Workers (Respondents), 1987

Activity	Rural	Urban	Total
Agriculture	47.1	17.5	38.3
Horticulture	5.7	2.6	4.3
Rearing Live Stock	11.7	4.6	9.7
Crafts (Processing and Manufacturing)	12.8	29.4	18.6
Collection of Goods	6.7	3.4	6.6
Services	11.5	28.4	15.4
Vendors/Hawkers	1.8	7.7	3.6
Construction Workers	2.7	6.4	3.5
	100	100	100

Table 7. Proportion of Activity Responses to Total Female Workers (Respondents) 1987  
Percentage of total female workers

	Agri- culture	Horti- culture	Live Stock	Craft Pro- cessing and Manufacturing	Collect- ion of Goods	Services	Vendors Hawkers	Cons- truction workers
Rural	92.4	11.1	22.9	25.1	13.1	22.6	3.6	5.3
Urban	25.4	3.7	6.7	42.7	4.9	41.2	11.8	9.3
Total	65.9	7.4	16.7	32.1	11.3	26.4	6.8	6.1

The extent of multiplicity of work performed by female workers can also be explained with the help of a comparative study of Tables 6 and 7. In Table 6, It can be seen that although agriculture claims only 38.3 per cent of the total responses, yet these responses as a percentage to total worker, swell to 65.9 per cent (Table 7). This percentage in rural areas is as high as 92.4 per cent. For other occupations this percentage gets inflated to 32.1 per cent in crafts processing and manufacturing (urban areas 42.7 and rural areas 25.1 per cent), 26.4 per cent in services (urban areas 41.2 and rural areas 22.6 per cent), 16.7 per cent in livestock/dairy (urban areas 6.7 per cent and rural areas 22.9 per cent), 6.2 per cent for vendors/hawkers (urban areas 11.2 per cent and rural areas 3.6 pr cent) 6.1 per cent in construction work (urban areas 5.3 per cent and rural areas 6.7 per cent.)

Information was also sought about the participation of female workers by minor activity group within the major categories of occupational classification. A large number of them have been engaged in more than one activity within the same occupational group. This was more common in agriculture. Within agriculture as a percentage to total responses in agriculture, the

proportion of female working in others' fields is as high as 41.3 per cent, followed by working in their own farm 38.6 per cent.

Among horticultural occupations, growing vegetables accounts for nearly 50 per cent responses recorded in horticulture followed by growing fruits by 25.4 per cent, growing flowers by 11.9 per cent.

Similarly, in rearing livestock, cattle/dairy accounts for 49.4 per cent of total responses recorded in livestock rearing, followed by poultry 23.2 per cent, piggery/goatery 18.0.

Among crafts (processing and manufacturing), food processing accounts for the largest number of responses claiming 26.3 per cent, followed by spinning and weaving 16.9 per cent, cane, bamboo and mat weaving 14.4 per cent.

Among collection of goods, fuel and fodder collection accounts for 78.4 per cent of total responses in this group of activities; followed by 11.5 per cent in collection of fruits, seeds, leaves etc.

Among female workers in services, domestic services accounts for 38.2 per cent to total female response in services occupations, followed by sweeping and scavenging (18.7 per cent) and washing (14.2 per cent).

Amongst vendors and hawkers, vegetable and fruit selling accounts for 37.8 per cent of responses in this group of occupation followed by selling of processed food, 11.9 per cent, selling of flowers 9.4 per cent and garments 8.8 per cent.

Amongst construction workers about 50 per cent of total responses are from building and road construction alone. Another 36.6 per cent are in quarrying and stone crushing. Brick-kiln accounts for 13.3 per cent of responses in this sector.

Table 8. Percentage Distribution of Activity Responses of Female Workers (Respondents) by Minor Activity Group, 1987

Activity Group	Percentage Distribution
<i>Agriculture</i>	
Own farm	88.6
In other's field	41.3
Agriculture processing	1.5
Others	1.6
Total	100
<i>Horticulture</i>	
Growing vegetables	49.0
Growing fruits	25.4
Growing herbs	3.4
Growing flowers	11.9
Others	9.4
Total	100
<i>Rearing Live-Stock</i>	
Cattle, dairy	49.4
Poultry	23.2
Piggery/goatery	18.9
Fishery	4.1
Silk worm	2.5
Others	2.8
Total	100

<i>Crafts (Processing &amp; Manufacturing)</i>	14.4	
Cane/bamboo/mat weaving	16.9	
Spinning/weaving	1.3	
Cashew	1.9	
Coir	9.0	
Tobacco/processing/bidi rolling	1.6	
Dyeing/printing	1.0	
Brewing	2.5	
Pottery	3.1	
Paper and paper products	0.0	
Leather products	4.0	
Tanning	1.1	
Match making	0.0	
Leaf products	4.5	
Toy making/carpentry	2.1	
Embroidery/zari work/chikan/lace making/tailoring	26.3	
Food processing	8.0	
Utensils	2.3	
Others	100	
Total		
<i>Collection of Goods</i>	56.2	
Fuel	22.2	
Fodder	6.1	
Fruits/seeds	5.4	
Leaves (tendu, sal)	2.1	
Other minor forest produce (gum, lace, katha, etc.)	1.9	
Paper and other waste material	6.1	
Others	100	
Total		
<i>Services</i>	38.2	
Domestic	18.7	
Sweeping/scavenging	14.2	
Washing	3.6	
Mid-wifery	3.0	
Community health volunteers	9.2	
Instructress (non-formal education)	13.0	
Others	100	
Total		
<i>Vendors/hawkers</i>		37.8
Vegetables/fruit	7.2	
Utensils	11.9	
Processed food	9.4	
Flowers	8.8	
Garments	24.9	
Others	100	
Total		



### Construction Workers

Quarry workers/stone crusher	36.6
Brick-kiln worker	13.3
Any other	50.1
Total	100

Employment Status: The statistics relating to employment statistics of working females are startling. Under sheer force of compulsion and urge to survive, they are confronted with multiple employment status which varies from mainly unpaid family work to wage labour outside home and rendering of services in exchange of goods and services in kind. On the whole, wage labour constitutes the major source of employment. As a percentage to total responses on employment status, wage labour accounts for 33.6 per cent of total responses. It is followed by unpaid family work (29.8 per cent), independent work (24.4 per cent and contract and piece-rate work (8.8 per cent).

Table 9 Percentage Distribution of Responses on Employment Status, 1987

Nature of Employment	Percentage Distribution of Responses		
	Rural	Urban	Total
Unpaid family work	36.5	19.7	29.8
Wage labour outside home	30.7	35.2	33.6
Contract/piece-rate paid work at home	6.1	16.2	8.8
Independent work	23.6	25.9	24.4
Exchange of goods and services in kind	3.2	3.1	3.4

There is a high degree of multiplicity in the nature of employment or employment status of female workers. Their employment varies from work (activity) to work and also within the same work (activity). A comparative study of Tables 9 and 10 clearly illustrate the incidence of multiplicity in the nature of employment of female workers. Although unpaid family work in rural areas claims 36.5 per cent to total responses, yet as percentage to total workers it increases to 71.6 per cent (Table 9). The incidence of unpaid family work in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas. As a percentage to total female workers, the responses under unpaid family work accounts for 51.4 per cent of total female workers. In rural areas, this percentage is as high as 71.6 as against 28.6 in urban areas. The corresponding figures in wage labour outside home are 57.9 per cent (60.2 per cent rural areas and 50.0 per cent urban areas), followed by independent work 49.9 per cent.

The largest concentration of unpaid family workers have been found in agricultural groups followed by those in collection of goods, particularly fuel and fooder, followed by domestic services. As a percentage to total female workers, it can be seen that in rural areas over two-fifths of female workers are as unpaid family workers, about two-thirds are in wage labour outside the home. Contract/piece-rate workers accounted for nearly one-sixth of the total female workers. The incidence of contract/piece-rate workers is higher in urban areas (23.5 per cent) than rural areas (11.9 per cent). They are mostly engaged in food processing, spinning, weaving, tobacco processing, bidi-rolling, tanning, paper and paper products. 49.9 per cent of the female workers are reported to be engaged as independent workers most of there are in

**Table 10. Proportion of Responses on Employment Status to Total Female Workers, 1987**

Nature of Employment	Percentage of total female workers (Respondents)		
	Rural	Urban	Total
Unpaid family work	71.6	28.6	51.4
Wage labour outside home	60.2	51.0	57.9
Contract/piece rate/paid work at home	11.9	23.5	15.1
Independent work	46.3	37.6	49.9
Exchange of goods and services in kind	6.2	4.4	5.9

*Note:* Percentage distribution exceeds 100 on account of multiplicity of responses.

fisheries sericulture, toy making and carpentry, food processing, collection of minor forest produce, rage-picking, vendors of utensils processed food, flowers and garments. Over 6 per cent of workers are engaged in exchange of goods and services of kind mainly in collection of fruits and seeds, tendu and sal leaves, etc. (The above proportions are with reference to total number of female workers and exceed 100 on account of the multiplicity of employment status of female workers.)

*Earnings:* On average a female worker (respondent) earns Rs. 1935 per annum (Rs. 1773 in rural areas and Rs. 2459 in urban areas) and the average annual income per family works out to be Rs. 4863 (Rs. 4638 in rural areas and Rs. 6268 in urban areas). The per capita income of family is thus, merely Rs. 916. In rural areas, it is as low as Rs. 866 and in urban areas as Rs. 1160. Rural urban differences in income are thus quitic substantial.

A study of per capita income of family by nature of occupation reveals that the lowest per capita income is found among wage labourers working outside the home Rs. 836 (Rs. 738 in rural areas and Rs. 1089 in urban areas). The average per capita income of respondents engaged in independent work works out to be Rs. 920, and of those engaged in contract and piece-rate work at home as Rs. 975. On the whole, the per capita income among unprotected female workers is incredibly low. It works out to be considerably less than one third of the all India average figure of the per capita income.

**Table 11. Average Earnings of Female Workers (Respondents) and Family, 1987**

	Average Income in Rs.		
	Respondent	FamilyShare of Respondent Income in Family	
Rural	1773	4638	<b>37</b>
Urban	2459	6098	39
Unspecified	1938	4798	40
Total	1935	4863	39

Table 12. Per Capita Income by Nature of Employment of Female Workers (Respondents) 1987

Nature of Employment	Rural	Urban	Total
Unpaid family work	991	1063	957
Wage labour outside home	738	1092	806
Contract/piece rate/paid work at home	908	1062	975
Independent work	899	1137	920
Exchange of goods and services in kind	1005	1049	1018
Total	866	1160	816

Share of Respondents income to Family Income: As many as 25.9 per cent of the female workers are the sole supporters of their families. Even with their low earning the contribution of an individual female workers to in the family income has been significant. About 36.7 per cent of female workers (respondents) have reported to be contributing over 50 per cent of the total family income and another 30 per cent contribute between 30 to 50 per cent of the family income. The average contribution of a single female workers (respondents) to the family income works out to be 40 per cent. Per workers earnings in the case of females who sole supporters of a then families works out to Rs. 3180 per annum.

Table 13. Share of Earnings of Female Workers (Respondents) in Family Income

Contribution to Family Income	Percentage of Respondents		
	Rural	Urban	Total
Upto 10%	9.2	10.8	8.8
10-20%	13.4	12.0	12.4
20-30%	13.5	12.5	13.2
30-40%	15.0	13.6	15.1
40-50%	14.1	13.1	13.9
50-60%	4.3	3.8	3.9
60-70%	3.0	3.1	3.0
70-80%	2.1	2.5	2.2
80-90%	1.6	1.9	1.7
100%	23.7	26.7	25.9
Average income of those contributing 100%	2991	3941	3180

The study of percentage distribution of female workers (respondents) by broad income ranges presents an appalling picture. As many as 13.5 per cent of female workers earned less than Rs. 500 per annum. Another 27.8 per cent earned below Rs. 1000 per annum, i.e., 41.3 per cent earned less than Rs. 1000 per annum. About 85 per cent earned less than Rs. 3000 per annum i.e. half of the existing ceiling prescribed for classifying a family below the poverty line. The situation improves only marginally by adding the earnings of all the family members, as 77.1 per cent of the families still earn below Rs. 5000 per annum.

**Table 14. Percentage Distribution of Female Workers (Respondents) by Broad Income Ranges, 1987**

Income Ranges	(in Rupees)					
	Respondents Income			Family Income		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Upto Rs. 500	15.2	8.6	13.5	2.7	2.0	2.9
Rs. 501-1000	30.3	21.6	27.8	10.3	5.7	9.5
Rs. 1001-3000	41.7	48.7	43.9	44.9	32.9	42.4
Rs. 3001-5000	9.1	13.4	10.4	20.9	24.7	21.7
Rs. 5000 + above	3.7	7.7	5.1	21.3	34.8	23.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Multiple Activity Status:** On account of high incidence of casualisation, intermittency of work and erratic availability of work, a sizeable number of female workers need to take up multiple occupation to be able to take out a living. The incidence of multiplicity of activities (takes into account the multiplicity of their employment status between and within various broad activity groups) works out to be as high 4.2 per female worker, i.e. on an average a female worker is engaged in 4.2 activities. The incidence is highest in rearing livestock where average number of activities per worker works out to be 5.5. The corresponding figures for those engaged in agriculture and services are 4.7 and 4.4 respectively. This incidence of multiplicity of activities is rather low among those engaged in construction work (3.26) and vending (3.27).

Even considering the broad categories of activities, the incidence of multiplicity of work among female workers works out to be as high as 1.7 activities per worker. It is significant to note that the multiplicity of activities status among female workers is much higher within the same board activity group than between various activity groups. A study of incidence of multiplicity of activity by broad activity group reveals that as many as 33 per cent of females have reported to be engaged in multiple occupations ranging from two occupations to four or more. The percentage of females reported to be taking up more than four activities in their fight to support themselves and their families is 7.4. The incidence of multiplicity of activities is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In rural areas, as many as 40 per cent of female workers (respondents) were engaged in more than one activities. Nearly one-fifth of these were engaged in two main activities and another 11 per cent in more than four main activities.

**Perception of Work:** Over 71 per cent of respondents considered themselves as workers 14.4 per cent categorically described their status as non-workers and another 14.4 per cent abstained from expressing their views. Interestingly, the proportion of respondents perceiving themselves as workers was greater among the Scheduled Castes than in the other communities. Again, self perception of respondents as workers is much higher in urban areas than in the rural areas. Among the Scheduled Castes in urban areas, the number of respondents regarding themselves as workers is as high as 80.9 per cent.

**Table 15. Incidence of Multiplicity of Activity By Board Activity Groups, 1987.**

Activity Group	Average No. of Activities per workers
Agriculture	4.73
Horticulture	3.67
Rearing Live-Stock	5.47
Crafts	3.86
Collection of Goods	3.58
Services	4.42
Vendors/hawkers	3.27
Construction workers	3.26
Total	4.20

**Table 16. Distribution of Female Workers (Respondents) by Multiple Activities, 1987**

	Numbers of Activities Engaged in					Total
	Number of Activities Engaged in					
	One Activity only	Two Activities	Three Activities	Four Activities	More than four activities	
Rural	60.3	17.0	7.2	4.5	11.0	100
Urban	79.2	16.4	4.3	1.7	3.4	100
Total	67.2	16.4	5.6	3.4	7.4	100

**Table 17 Perception of Work by Respondent by Caste**

Perception		Caste				Total
		Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Other Backward Classes	Others	
Rural	Workers	72.6	67.7	67.1	70.8	68.9
	Non-workers	16.8	20.5	23.9	18.2	19.1
	Unspecified	10.6	11.8	9.0	11.0	12.0
Urban	Workers	80.9	72.8	71.1	75.1	73.7
	Non-Workers	11.1	10.8	21.3	13.2	14.1
	Unspecified	8.0	16.4	7.6	11.7	12.2
Total	Workers	75.9	71.1	71.5	73.3	71.1
	Non-workers	12.6	15.5	18.7	13.7	14.4
	Unspecified	11.5	13.4	9.8	13.1	14.4



*Participation in Local Organisations:* The participation of poor female workers in organisations like Mahila Mandals, Cooperative Societies, Panchayats, Labour Unions is rather commendable. As many as 63.7 per cent of female workers are members of some other organisations. The proportion of female workers availing of such membership is the highest amongst those engaged in construction work (73.7 per cent), followed by those engaged in collection of goods (70.8 per cent) and services (66.8 per cent). As for employment status, females engaged in or wage labour outside home, appears to be more willing to become member of local organisations. The total number of females availing of such facilities in this group was 68.4 per cent followed by those engaged in exchange of goods (67.0 per cent) and contract/piece-rate paid work at home (66.9 per cent). The high responses recorded in availing of membership of some or the other organisation in the survey can be attributed to the fact that the interviewers were largely drawn from voluntary organisations and for reasons of expediency they profound to approach to the members of their organisation.

**Table 18. Participation of Female Workers (Respondents) in Local and Other Organisations by Broad Activity Group and Nature of Employment, 1987**

Activity/Employment Status	Percentage of Female Workers (Respondents)		
	Rural	Urban	Total
<i>Nature of Activity</i>			
1. Agriculture	65.6	72.2	65.3
2. Horticulture	63.6	64.6	64.3
3. Rearing Livestock	65.3	63.0	65.9
4. Crafts (Processing & Manufacturing)	62.9	72.2	66.1
5. Collection of Goods	66.9	71.6	70.8
6. Services	60.6	71.0	66.8
7. Vendors/Hawkers	68.1	74.5	71.8
8. Construction Workers	70.3	78.9	73.5
<i>Nature of Employment</i>			
1. Unpaid Family Work	65.5	74.8	66.7
2. Wage Labour Outside Home	69.5	70.1	68.4
3. Contract/Piece-rate/Paid Work at Home	61.0	71.2	66.9
4. Independent Work	58.9	71.9	64.6
5. Exchange of Goods and Services in Kind	63.2	75.2	67.0
Total	64.6	67.6	63.7

The problems: The poor female workers are socially and economically unprotected in their varying work situations. They are confronted with a wide range of problems from various groups and vested interests. Classifying these problems in broad groups, from an open ended questionnaire particularly when the respondents have listed numerous issues and problems running into several pages, has not been an easy task. To cluster these into water-tight categories can hardly do justice to the sensitivity of the responses and represent the reality in

its true spirit. The present analysis of the problems faced by the poor women suffers from this limitation.

On the basis of the responses received (from the respondents), the problems faced by the female workers during the course of their work, are grouped under three major heads viz., (i) problems specific to wage employment, (ii) problems relating to women employed in non-wage sector, (iii) general problems common to both the wage and non-wage sector.

**Problems Specific to Wage Employment:** Out of a total of 61,039 responses recorded as many as 50.7 per cent to low wages (below subsistence level). This is followed by irregular employment/uncertainty/seasonal or discretionary employment (41.2 per cent), and malpractices in payment (9.1 per cent). The various forms in which malpractices have been reported include non-payment of wages on time, signatures on false amount, commission charged while making payment and even while providing employment and payment in kind (only subsistence and inferior goods are made available).

The relative incidence of irregular employment was found highest in agriculture (49.5 per cent), followed by construction work (46.1 per cent), and collection of goods (42.7 per cent).

Table 19. Percentage Distribution of Problems Faced by Female Workers (Respondents) by Nature of Activity, 1987

Problems	Agriculture	Horticulture	Rearing live stock	Crafts processing and manufacturing	Collection of goods	Services Hawker	Vendors	Construction workers	Total
<i>Wage Employment</i>									
Irregular Employment	49.5	38.9	40.2	41.7	42.7	34.6	38.3	46.1	41.2
Low Wages	44.0	54.0	54.0	52.1	52.1	58.7	57.2	47.2	50.7
Mal-practices in Payment	6.4	7.0	5.8	6.2	5.2	6.7	4.5	66.7	9.4
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Non-Wage Employment</i>									
Lack of access to raw material & capital goods	63.6	57.5	56.8	48.5	58.9	51.6	25.4	41.7	52.3
Marketing	20.0	26.3	25.5	35.3	29.2	31.2	55.2	28.2	26.8
Credit from official sources	15.7	15.8	17.2	15.6	11.3	16.4	17.4	28.4	17.2
Credit from non-official sources	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.6	60.6	0.8	1.7	1.7	0.7
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*General Problem*

Personal & health	39.5	36.2	36.3	37.9	43.4	44.4	38.5	45.0	38.7
Exploitation &-	16.2	9.5	8.0	16.5	13.9	19.0	15.0	21.0	16.1

harassment by  
family/husband/-  
employer

Lack of educa-  
tional guidance  
and training  
facilities

Alcoholism lack of  
access to  
earnings

Lack of social  
security

Other problems

100 100 100 100 100 100 100 100 100

Problems Specific to Non-Wage Employment: Out of a total number of 41,305 responses recorded, as many as 52.3 per cent pertain to lack of access to raw material and capital goods including poor quality/insufficient/non/availability/irregular supply of raw materials, exorbitant prices and lack of storage facilities. This is followed by the problems relating to marketing (26.8 per cent) and problems relating to credit (18 per cent). Problems relating to marketing include lack of proper storage facilities, problems relating to transportation and distance; harassment; non-availability of markets or saturated markets, low and uneconomic selling price; cheating by middlemen/contractors, in weighing, measurement and counting; irregular/seasonal market, lack of facilities for product design; difficulties in obtaining license and space for vending at market centres, high rent for hiring space or shops for vending/selling etc.

Problems relating to credit from official sources include highly time consuming/procedural formalities, difficulties in arranging, surety and security, malpractices and corruption in granting credit, insufficient and non-availability of credit and even lack of information about the availability of credit from various sources. Problems relating to credit from non-official sources are mainly exorbitant rates of interest charged and malpractices while providing credit and realising the payments.

In agriculture, lack of access to raw materials, tools and implements accounts for a high percentage, i.e. 63.6 per cent of the total problems recorded. In the case of activities under collection of goods, this percentage is as high as 58.9, and in horticulture it is 57.5 per cent.

Relatively speaking, problems related to marketing have been more acute amongst vendors and hawkers. In their case, marketing accounts for 55.2 per cent of the total problems recorded. Their marketing problems mainly include non-availability of space/shop for selling and the insecurity associated with this rather than lack of demand for their products. In crafts (processing and manufacturing) the problems relating to marketing account for 35.3 per cent of the total problems recorded.

General Problems: General problems common both to wage and non-wage employment include (a) exploitation and harassment by family members, employers, contractors, officials and the community during the course of their work, (b) child care, health and allied problems including non-availability of creches, improper working conditions, lack of sanitation, lack of medical facilities, (c) lack of education, training, organisation and guidance facilities, (d) lack of access to own earnings and misuse of earnings by husbands, alcoholism of husband, absence of maternity benefits, medical benefits' compensation for injury, absence of provident fund, pension and insurance etc.

Out of a total of 1,41,260 responses recorded as general problems the problems relating to health, sanitation and child care account for the largest share (38.7 per cent). This is followed by problems relating to exploitation and harassment by family members including the husband and employer (16.1 per cent), problems of lack of education, training and guidance facilities (10.9 per cent), problems of alcoholism of husband and lack of access to their own earnings (4.2 per cent). The incidence of alcoholism among vendors and hawkers appears to be the highest.

In construction work, the percentage share of total responses recorded under personal and health problems is the highest, i.e 45.0 per cent.

It may be noted that the responses recorded under lack of social security benefits like maternity benefits and sick leave etc. are low, accounting for only 2.9 per cent of total responses. This probably shows lack of awareness amongst the poor labouring women about the availability or necessity of such facilities for them.

Other problems constituting about 26.4 per cent of the total responses recorded under the general group include mainly absence of assets including land and housing, continued drought and famine situations and occupational health hazards.

The problems faced by the poor working women are thus the reflection of their socio-economic milieu which generates all kinds of odds against them in their struggle for a living. The longer this situation persists, the longer will it take the nation to break the shackles of poverty and under-development.

Annexure-I

## **NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN APPEAL**

*The Commission intends to generate as much data as possible regarding work status of poor women. Hence please obtain the information, as required in the enclosed questionnaire, from as many poor women as possible in your neighbourhood, village, town or city.*

*The Commission hopes to receive active cooperation and support from the voluntary agencies, educational institutions, trade unions, social workers, media personnel and individuals in both governmental and nongovernmental organisations in its national effort to generate this important data.*

*The agencies/individuals collecting this information are also requested to bring to the notice of the poor women, particularly the respondents of the questionnaire, that this Commission has been set up to look into the problems of poor working women.*

**Filled in Questionnaires should be sent to Smt. Ela R. Bhatt, M.P., Chairperson, National Commission on Self-Employed Women/New Delhi 110001.**

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING UP QUESTIONNAIRE

Please go through the Questionnaire and instructions carefully before interviewing the respondents.

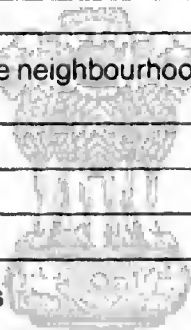
### Item of Questionnaire

### Instructions

Write clear in blank spaces and fill in proper code in boxes carefully. Write only one digit in one box.

1. Leave boxes ☐ - ☐ and ☐ - ☐ as blank.  
Write name of State, District and Town/Villages in the blank space. Fill up boxes ☐ - ☐ appropriately as: 01 Andhra Pradesh, 02 Arunachal Pradesh, 03 Assam, 04 Bihar, 05 Gujarat, 06 Haryana, 07 Himachal Pradesh, 08 Jammu and Kashmir, 09 Karnataka, 10 Kerala, 11 Madhya Pradesh, 12 Maharashtra, 13 Manipur, 14 Meghalaya, 15 Nagaland, 16 Orissa, 17 Punjab, 18 Rajasthan, 19 Sikkim, 20 Tamil Nadu, 21 Tripura, 22 Uttar Pradesh, 23 West Bengal, 24 Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 25 Chandigarh, 26 Dadra and Nagar Haveli, 27 Delhi, 28 Goa, Daman and Diu, 29 Lakshadweep, 30 Mizoram, 31 Pondicherry.
- 2.2 **Religion:** Write the religion of respondent in blank space. Fill up the code as 1 Hindu, 2 Muslim, 3 Sikh, 4 Jain, 5 Buddhist, 6 Parsi, 7 Christian, 8 Others in box ☐.
- 2.3 **Caste/Community:** Write the name of the caste or community in blank space. Fill up the code as 1 Scheduled Castes, 2 Scheduled tribes, 3 Other Backward Classes, 4 Others in box ☐.
- 2.4 **Age:** It should be recorded in completed year carefully after cross questioning the respondent in boxes ☐ - ☐.
- 2.5 **Education:** Write the highest educational qualification attained in blank space. Fill up appropriate code in box ☐.  
as 1 Illiterate, 2 Literate but below Primary, 3 Primary but not Middle, 4 Middle but below High School, 5 High School but below Graduate, 6 Graduate and above
- 2.7 Record specifically if the respondent is member of some local organisation like Mahila Mandal, Panchayat, Labour Union and Cooperative Societies and any other organisations.
- 2.8 Record the activities in which females in neighbourhood/village are largely engaged in.
- 3.1 3.2, 3.3 Indicate total number of members against appropriate boxes for instance if there are five male adults then under total in box ☐ please record 5. Similarly, if number of adult male literates is two then the same may be recorded in box ☐. If the number of adult earners is three then 3 may be recorded in box ☐.
- 3.4 The approximate earnings of the family may be recorded after adding the earnings of all the individual earners.
4. Please go through column 1 of activities carefully. Record all possible activities in which the respondent and her family members are engaged in against the occupations listed in column 1 by putting tick mark (✓) in columns 2,4,5,6,7,8, wherever applicable. Rest of the columns (i.e) those which are not applicable should be left blank. In column 3 kindly put number of members performing activities against column 1 as applicable. Please make special efforts to elicit information about their various economic activities.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Identification	□□□□	1-5
1.1 State _____	□□	6-7
1.2 District _____	□□	8-9
1.3 Town/Village _____	□□□□	10-13
<b>2. Respondent's Particulars</b>		
2.1 Name _____		
2.2 Religion _____	□	15
1 Hindu, 2 Muslim, 3 Sikh, 4 Jain 5 Buddhist, 6 Parsi, 7 Christian, 8 Others		
2.3 Caste/Community Specify _____ ISC, 2 ST, 3 Backward Classes, 4 Others	□□	16
2.4 Age _____	□□	17-18
2.5 Education _____	□	19
_____		
2.6 Do you work? 1 Yes 2 No	□□	20
2.7 Are you member of any organisation? 1 No, 2 Member only, 3 Office bearer	□□	21
If yes, name of the organisation _____		
_____		
2.8 What work the other women in the neighbourhood/mohalla/village do?		
_____		
_____		
_____		
_____		
<b>3. Particulars of Family Members</b>		
	 नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय	
	Total	Literate
	Earner	
3.1 Adults (18 years and above)	Male	22-24
	Female	25-27
3.2 Children (below 18 years)	Male	28-30
	Female	31-33
3.3 Total members		34-39
3.4 Total annual earnings of family in Rs.	□□□□□	40-44
3.5 Total annual earning of respondent in Rs.	□□□□□	45-49

5. What problems you face in your work?

- (i) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- (ii) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

(iii)

**4. Nature of Activities engaged in:- Please mark✓in appropriate box(es) where applicable.**

Activity	Husband	Others	Activity done by				
			Unpaid family work	Wage labour out side home	Contract/piece rate/paid work at home	Independent work	Exchange of goods and services in kind
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
10 Agriculture							
11 Own farm							
12 In other's field							
13 Agriculture processing							
14 Others							
20 Horticulture							
21 Growing vegetables							
22 Growing fruits							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
23 Growing herbs							
24 Growing flowers							
25 Others							
30 Rearing Live-Stock							
31 Cattle							
32 Poultry							
33 Piggery/Goatery							
34 Fishery							
35 Silk worm							
36 Others							
40 Crafts (Processing and Manufacturing)							
41 Cane/Bamboo/Mat weaving							
42 Spinning/Weaving							
43 Cashew							
44 Coir							
45 Tobacco procession/Bidi Rolling							
46 Dyeing/Printing							
47 Brewing							
48 Pottery							
49 Paper and Paper Rolling							
50 Leather products							

51 Tanning								
52 Match making								
53 Leaf products								
54 Toy making								
55 Embroidery/Zari work/Chikan/ Lace making/tailoring								
56 Food Processing								
57 Utensils								
58 Others								
60 Collection of Goods								
61 Fuel								
62 Fodder								
63 Fruits/seeds								
64 Leaves (Tendu, Sal)								
65 Other minor forest produce (gum, lace, katha etc.)								
66 Paper and other waste material								
67 Others								
70 Services								
71 Rural/Urban								
72 Domestic								
73 Seeping/Scavenging								
74 Washing								
75 Mid-wifery								
76 Community health volunteers								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
77 instructress non-formal education								
78 Other								
80 Vendors/Hawkers								
81 Vegetables/fruits								
82 Utensils								
83 Processed food								
84 Flowers								
85 Garments								
86 Other								
90 Construction Workers								
91 Quarry worker/Stone crusher								
92 Brick-kiln worker								
93 Any other								

Date, name and signature of the interviewer \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX X

### Secretariate of The National Commission on Self Employed Women

1. Miss Veena Kohli	Member Secretary
2. Mrs. Sunipa Basu	Director
3. Miss Preeti Bhat	Research Consultant
4. Dr. K.C. Nautiyal	Research Consultant
5. Mrs. Mukta Nidhi Samnotra	Section Officer
6. Sh. Roop Singh	Senior Research Investigator
7. Sh. R.G. Vijayan	Senior Research Investigator
8. Mr. Naresh Chand Saxena	Steno Grapher Grade 'C'
9. Miss Shubhangi Revankar	Steno Grapher Grade 'C'
10. Miss Sunita	Steno Grapher Grade 'D'
11. Miss Rashmi Chawla	Steno Grapher Grade 'D'
12. Miss Rita	L.D.C.
13. Sh. Hukam Singh	L.D.C.
14. Mr. Pooran Singh	Peon
15. Sh. Prem Babu	Safai wala cum farash



सत्यमेव जयते